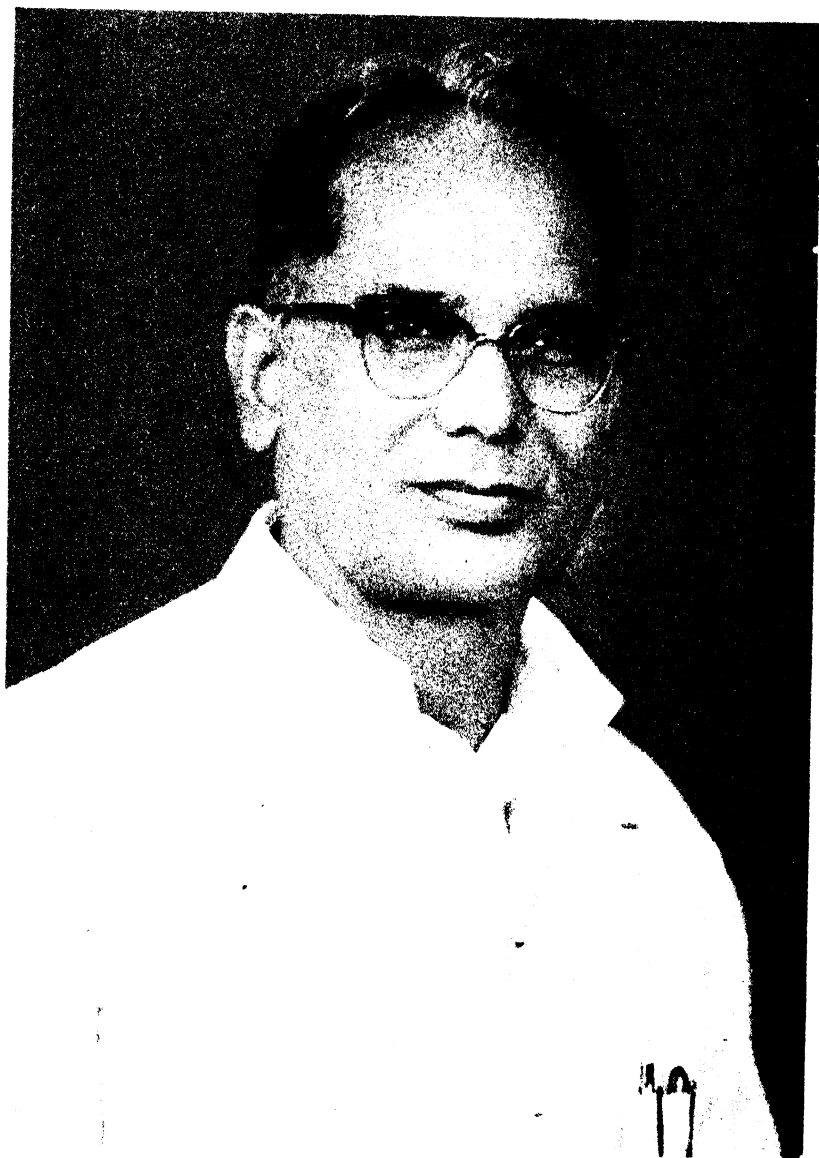


SOCIALISM SARVODAYA AND DEMOCRACY

RAKASH NARAYAN

EDITED BY BIMLA PRASAD

SOCIALISM, SARVODAYA AND DEMOCRACY



JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN

SOCIALISM SARVODAYA AND DEMOCRACY

SELECTED WORKS OF
JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN

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Preface

This selection of Sri Jayaprakash Narayan's writings and speeches has been prepared with a view to giving the reader an idea of the evolution and the main elements of his political philosophy. As one privileged to remain in close contact with him and to follow the development of his thought since 1946, I have long felt the urge to bring out such a selection. Apart from the fact that he is one of the greatest political thinkers whom India has ever produced, the need for it is underlined by the growing desire on the part of a large number of serious-minded persons, in India as well as abroad, to know more about his thought than an occasional writing in some journal or pamphlet which they come across might present. Besides, his writings and speeches have emerged out of his leadership of the socialist movement in India for over a quarter of a century and are indispensable for a study of the history of that movement. They are also not without a bearing on the situation in India today and their study will help us in understanding the problems of Indian democracy in a proper perspective and in strengthening its foundations and enriching its content. And yet their appeal is by no means confined to India. By showing how a keen mind has travelled from Marxism to Democratic Socialism and then to Sarvodaya they reflect the changes in political thinking that have been taking place in several parts of the world, whatever the terms actually used. Similarly his writings on government and society raise problems and offer solutions which are not without relevance to the existing situation in most of Asia and Africa and deserve serious consideration by lovers of socialism and democracy all over the world.

It is a pleasure to thank all those who have helped in the preparation and publication of this book. First and foremost, my thanks are due to Sri Jayaprakash Narayan for his kindness in permitting me to get this selection published and for the trust he showed in me by giving me complete freedom in editing it. The blessings of his wife, Srimati Prabhavati Devi,

who is looked upon as a mother by innumerable young men and women throughout the country, served as a great source of encouragement. My friend, Sri Brahmananda, Private Secretary to Sri Jayaprakash Narayan, saved me much time and labour by placing at my disposal a large collection of Sri Narayan's writings and speeches, and I am thankful to him for this help. A research student of mine, Sri Razi Ahmad, deserves thanks for having prepared the Index. My thanks are also due to Sri P. S. Jayasinghe, Publisher, Asia Publishing House, whose sympathetic interest in the project facilitated my task to a great extent. Last but not the least, I must thank my wife, Srimati Asha Prasad, but for whose cooperation I would not have found time to complete this work. Needless to add, the idea of bringing out this selection originated from me and it was only after much effort on my part that Sri Jayaprakash Narayan, with his characteristic spirit of self-abnegation, could be persuaded to agree to it. Similarly, I alone must be held responsible for any mistake in editing this selection or for any wrong interpretation which may be found in the Introduction.

It may also be pointed out that this is not a comprehensive collection of all the major speeches and writings of Sri Jayaprakash Narayan, but only a selection from them in accordance with the theme indicated by the title of this volume. Another volume under the title *Freedom and Peace*, based on a similar selection, is under preparation and will be published in due course.

BIMLA PRASAD

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Introduction

“The past course of my life,” says J. P. (as Sri Jayaprakash Narayan is popularly called), “might well appear to the outsider as a zigzag and tortuous chart of unsteadiness and blind groping. But as I look back I discern in it a uniform line of development.” This uniform line of development will also be discerned by all those who read carefully the chapter entitled “From Socialism to Sarvodaya,” where this statement occurs, as well as the other chapters of this book. J. P.’s debut into public life began in 1921, as a fighter for Indian freedom under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Born in a village lower middle class family in Bihar on October 11, 1902, he had received a merit scholarship as a result of his performance at the Matriculation examination and was then a second year science student in the Patna College, the premier educational institution of that province. The university examination was only a few weeks ahead and the fee for it had already been deposited. But Gandhi’s call for non-cooperation with all educational institutions maintained or aided by the Government became irresistible and J. P. walked out of the Patna College. It was then that freedom became one of the beacon lights of his life and has remained so ever since. “Freedom, with the passing of the years,” he writes, “transcended the mere freedom of my country and embraced freedom of man everywhere and from every sort of trammel — above all, it meant freedom of the human personality, freedom of the mind, freedom of the spirit. This freedom has become a passion of life and I shall not see it compromised for bread, for power, for security, for prosperity, for the glory of the State or for anything else.”

After leaving the Patna College J. P. enrolled himself as a student in the Bihar Vidyapith, founded by the nationalist leaders for the benefit of non-cooperating students and not recognised by the Government. This institution did not have facilities for the teaching of science beyond the second year stage and, unlike many other students in similar circumstances,

J. P. could not be persuaded to return to the Patna College or to any college maintained or aided by the Government, even after the non-cooperation movement had subsided. But the desire for higher studies remained. So in 1922, he went to the United States, of course, without the necessary financial resources and leaving behind his old parents and beautiful wife, Prabhavati, whom he had married two years earlier. There he lived for seven years, studying by turn at the universities of California (Berkeley), Iowa, Wisconsin and Ohio (from where he graduated and took the Master's degree in Sociology) and working in fields, factories and hotels to meet his expenses. While studying at the Wisconsin University J. P. came in close contact with some communist students, avidly read the writings of Marx and his followers, and became fully converted to Marxism. Freedom still remained his goal, but the Marxian science of revolution seemed to offer a surer and quicker way to it than the technique of Gandhi. Besides, Marxism provided him with another goal, namely equality. It now became clear to him that political freedom was not enough and that it must be accompanied by freedom from exploitation and poverty.

Thus it was as a Marxist that J. P. returned to India in 1929, and resumed his place in the nationalist movement. He at once came in close contact with Gandhi, in whose Ashram Prabhavati had stayed during his absence abroad and been lovingly treated as their own daughter by both Gandhi and his wife, Kasturba. He also became very close to Nehru, who too was fascinated by Marxism in those days, and began to regard him as an elder brother (a relationship which abides in spite of occasional differences over public issues). Nehru was then president of the Congress and he placed J. P. in charge of the Labour Research Department of the All India Congress Committee. J. P. steadily rose in the esteem of his colleagues and during the second civil disobedience campaign of 1932, found himself as the Acting General Secretary of the Congress. After the arrest of the leading Congress figures he organised an underground office and directed the struggle in the various parts of the country for several months before he was arrested and sent to the Nasik prison. During this period the Indian communists, acting under instructions from the Comintern, not only stayed out of the nationalist struggle, but also denounced it as being waged in the interest of the bourgeoisie.

To an ardent nationalist like J. P. this came as a rude shock and appeared to be a perverted application of Marxism to the Indian situation. It became clear to him that the socialist movement in India could not be carried on under the leadership of the Indian Communist Party or the guidance of the Comintern, for the freedom of the country would have to be given the top priority so long as there remained the problem of foreign rule. This pointed to the need of organising a socialist party which would function within the broader framework of the nationalist movement. Such a party would also help keep the nationalist movement on the path of struggle and away from constitutionalism towards which it seemed to be drifting after the suspension of the civil disobedience movement. Besides, it would draw peasants and workers into the ranks of the nationalist movement and give a socialist orientation to the programme of that movement, thus strengthening the cause of nationalism as well as of socialism. The result of this thinking on J. P.'s part, shared by a substantial number of Congressmen including such a senior leader as Acharya Narendra Deva, resulted in the foundation in 1934, of the Congress Socialist Party, as an integral part of the Congress, with J. P. as its General Secretary. Thus began the career of J. P. as a leader of all-India stature in his own right at the age of thirty-two.

II

The decision to pursue a line of activity independent of the Comintern and the Communist Party of India did not mean any lessening of the faith in Marxism. Rather, J. P.'s view was that he and his colleagues in the Congress Socialist Party alone were applying Marxism correctly to the Indian situation and the Communists were wrong. This faith in Marxism comes out clearly in *Why Socialism?*, published in 1936. In the first chapter of this book, which is also the first chapter of the present selection, entitled "The Foundation of Socialism," J. P. says categorically that there is "only one type, one theory of Socialism — Marxism." Though he recognises that there are differences between various groups of socialists on the question of methods and tactics, he affirms that till then only Communists had vindicated their theory of tactics by their "great and remarkable success in Russia." What follows is a typically Marxist presentation

of Socialism: Socialism is a system of social reconstruction and not a code of personal conduct; no group of idealists can build up Socialism unless they have power in their hands; a Socialist Party in power can always establish socialism, provided it has either of two things: sufficient power of coercion to put down resistance or sufficient popular support to be able to deal with opposition; the root cause of inequality of wealth lies in the fact that the gifts of nature and the instruments of production have come to be privately owned by individuals for their own benefit; if, therefore, inequalities have to be removed, the remedy is to abolish the private ownership of the means of production and to establish over them the ownership of the whole community.

In the next chapter, "India and Socialism," J. P. refutes the contention that socialism cannot be established in India because her traditions are different from those of European countries and she is industrially very backward, and emphatically asserts that if there is a socialist party in power, with the requisite sanction behind it, it can build up socialism anywhere in the world. He then proceeds to discuss the steps that will have to be taken in order to build up socialism in India, elaborating the steps suggested in the programme of the Congress Socialist Party, drafted by himself: transfer of all power to the producing masses; development of the economic life of the country to be planned and controlled by the State; socialisation of key and principal industries, banks, insurance and public utilities, with a view to the progressive socialisation of all the means of production, distribution and exchange; State monopoly of foreign trade; organisation of cooperatives for production, distribution and credit in the unsocialised sector of the economy; elimination of princes and landlords and all other classes of exploiters without compensation; redistribution of land to peasants; encouragement and promotion of cooperative and collective farming by the State; liquidation of debts owed by peasants and workers; recognition of the right to work or maintenance by the State; "to everyone according to his needs and from everyone according to his capacity" to be the basis ultimately of distribution and production of economic goods; adult franchise on a functional basis; no support to or discrimination between religions by the State and no recognition of any distinction based on caste

or community; no discrimination between the sexes; and repudiation of the public debt of India.

The elaboration of these measures follows the usual Marxist pattern, but there are a few points which deserve special attention, for they show J. P.'s capacity for independent thinking even in those days as well as a continuity in his approach to some important problems of social and economic reconstruction. Thus while advocating the introduction of cooperative and collective farming he visualises the village and not, as in Russia, a conglomeration of several villages with huge collective farms as a unit for agricultural production. This villagisation of land was to correspond to the situation in the village communes of ancient India, with this difference that the socialist village, instead of being a closed economic unit, would be an actively cooperating unit in a larger economic system. Besides, the transition to cooperative and collective farming was to be slow and gradual and not hurriedly pushed as was done in Russia. Again, unlike Russia, there was to be no coercion to secure this transition, but only encouragement and promotion, through propaganda, demonstration, subsidy and preferential taxation. Nor were Russian techniques of agricultural production to be copied blindly. Indians, for instance, would need fewer labour-saving devices in view of their large population and shortage of land compared to the smaller population and vast virgin expanses of Russia. While the old inefficient plough might not be retained, there would be no need, at least till industrial development absorbed the surplus rural population, for many tractors and mechanical reapers and binders. There was also a strong criticism, even at that early stage, of the modern city, which, according to J. P., was for most of its dwellers a terrible place of habitation. Under socialism, cities would be planned and concentration avoided by diffusing industry, there being geographical planning as well as statistical. On the other hand, the village too would become a unit of industrial production. And so we come to the agro-industrial village, the ideal basis for planning India's future according to J. P.'s current thinking.

III

This capacity for independent thinking, both as regards the ultimate objectives and the immediate political strategy, soon

received further impetus. Though J. P. had taken the lead in the foundation of the Congress Socialist Party largely because of his conviction that the communists in India were following the wrong path by keeping themselves out of the nationalist struggle, he continued to hope that some day socialists and communists, in view of their common adherence to Marxism, might join hands together, thus leading to the emergence of a united socialist-communist party in India. This hope was strengthened by a change in communist tactics in India in 1936, following a new directive from the Comintern. According to the new line the Indian National Congress was no longer to be boycotted and destroyed, but supported as an anti-imperialist national front. The communists now sought to enter the Congress as well as the Congress Socialist Party. Largely at J. P.'s instance, and against the wishes of some of his leading colleagues, the doors of the Congress Socialist Party were opened to the communists and some of them were given important positions in the organisation. But the communists did not share J. P.'s dream; they were only using it to infiltrate into the Congress Socialist Party with the ultimate objective of destroying it. When this became fully known, the idea of working for the emergence of a united socialist-communist party was abandoned and, in 1940, the communists were expelled from the Congress Socialist Party. This experience of working with the communists had a lasting impact on J. P.'s mind and created in him a great revulsion towards their ways and methods. It also reinforced the doubts already raised by the trials and purges of communist leaders going on in Russia in the late thirties. This revulsion for communist methods led J. P. for the first time to question some of the generally accepted tenets of Marxism itself. He, of course, still had faith in the fundamentals of this creed and tried to justify whatever he said or did by referring to the writings of Marx, but more and more he distinguished his stand from that of the communists. In fact, though not abandoning Marxism, he began to describe his philosophy not as Marxism as he had done in the thirties, but as Democratic Socialism. This phase began as early as 1940, and lasted till 1952.

"An Outline Picture of *Swaraj*," prepared as a draft resolution for the Ramgarh session of the Indian National Congress, 1940, gives us the first glimpse of this phase in J. P.'s thinking. Here we

have the picture of a democratic socialist society in outline: the law of the land to be based on the will of the people freely expressed by them; guarantee of full individual and civil liberty and cultural and religious freedom; abolition of all distinctions of birth and privilege and guarantee of equal rights to all citizens; social justice and economic freedom to be the guiding principles of the political and economic organisation of the State; all large-scale production to be under collective ownership and control. The fascination for Gandhian ideas is also clearly discernible here. While the political and economic organisation of the State, the draft asserts, shall conduce to the satisfaction of the rational requirements of every member of society, material satisfaction shall not be its sole objective. On the other hand, it shall aim at creating conditions for healthy living and the moral and intellectual development of the individual. With this end in view, the State would endeavour to promote small-scale production carried on by individual or cooperative effort for the equal benefit of all concerned. The life of the villages would be reorganised, with a view to making them self-governing and self-sufficient in as large a measure as possible.

When this draft was prepared, the Second World War had already been on for several months and the struggle for Indian freedom was entering into its final phase. J. P. was in the forefront of this struggle. He was one of the first, if not the first, among the well-known leaders to be arrested, in March 1940, even before the Congress had started any struggle. What Gandhi said of him on that occasion while protesting against his arrest shows the high position he already occupied in the public life of the country. "He is," observed Gandhi, "no ordinary worker. He is an authority on socialism. It may be said that what he does not know of Western socialism nobody else in India does. He is a fine fighter. He has forsaken all for the sake of the deliverance of his country. His industry is tireless. His capacity for suffering is not to be excelled." Gandhi's protest had no effect on the Government and J. P. was sentenced to a term of imprisonment for nine months. After this term was over he was immediately arrested again and kept, without trial, in the special camp jail at Deoli in Western India. The prisoners there suffered from several disabilities. J. P. demanded their removal and went on a hunger-strike which was broken — after thirty-one days — only when

its objective was achieved. In August 1942, when the famous "Quit India" movement began, J. P. was still in prison, in Hazaribagh Central Jail in Bihar. He found life in prison intolerable while a revolution was in progress outside and next month managed to scale the prison walls and escape along with five other fellow-prisoners. The developments and events which followed—J. P.'s leadership of the underground nationalist workers scattered all over the country, his letters to the fighters of freedom, his organisation of the "Azad Dasta" or Army of Liberation, his arrest in Nepal while engaged in this work and rescue by the soldiers of his army, and his final arrest in a running train in the Punjab in September 1943—have become parts of the epic, though yet to be written, of the Indian struggle for freedom and need not be recounted here. Suffice it to note that by the time he was released from prison in 1946, about a year after the release of other top leaders, he had become a great mass figure and had taken his seat in the pantheon of national heroes by the side of such men as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose.

IV

During this period J. P. openly advocated the use of arms in the struggle for freedom, contrary to the stand of Gandhi. But so far as the struggle for socialism was concerned he felt more and more that the use of violent methods after the achievement of independence might not be necessary and should be avoided. Though this was defended by a reference to Marx, the impact of Gandhi was clearly there. The same was true of J. P.'s conception of the nature of a socialist society. This will become clear from a perusal of "My Picture of Socialism," published in 1946. Here J. P. calls himself a Marxist, but emphasises that the socialist movement in India must evolve its own picture of socialism in the light of Marxist thought, of world history since Marx's death and of conditions in this country and its historical background. As for Marxism, he points out that it is a science of society and a scientific method of social change and as such there can be no room for any dogmatism or fundamentalism in it. Proceeding on this basis he draws a picture of socialist India whose economic side consists of cooperative farms run by village panchayats; collective farms in new settlements; large-scale industry owned

and managed by the State; community owned and managed industry; and small-scale industry organised into producers' cooperatives. The last two types of industry deserve special attention, as they distinguish J. P.'s picture of a socialist society from that to be found in a communist State. They are advocated mainly on two grounds: firstly, because large-scale industry alone would not be able to provide employment to all, at least for a long time to come; and secondly, because the State must be prevented from acquiring the sole monopoly in industry and employment. "The State under socialism," writes J. P., "threatens, as in Russia, far from withering away to become an all-powerful tyrant maintaining a strangle-hold over the entire body of citizens. This leads to totalitarianism of the type we witness in Russia today. By dispersing the ownership and management of industry and by developing the villages into democratic village republics we break this strangle-hold to a very large extent and attenuate the danger of totalitarianism."

The distinction from Russia is carried further in the political part of the picture. Here J. P. unequivocally states that there can be no socialism without democracy. The dictatorship of the proletariat has a place only in the transitional stage and here too it is not inevitable in every case. Besides, dictatorship of the proletariat in Marxist theory does not mean the dictatorship of a single party, as in Russia. It is, moreover, the very essence of Marxism that once the transition is over, the State must become a fully democratic institution. Thus J. P.'s picture of a socialist India is the picture of an economic and political democracy. "In this democracy," he affirms, "man will neither be slave to capitalism nor to a party or the State. Man will be free."

In "The Transition to Socialism," published in 1947, J. P. deals with the question of the path to be followed for realising the goals outlined above. Referring to the observations of Marx at the Hague convention of the First International in 1872, he shows that Marx conceived of two ways to socialism, one peaceful where democratic conditions prevailed, the other violent where they did not. Which of the two ways should be adopted depends on conditions prevailing in each country. As far as India is concerned J. P. is confident of the emergence of democratic conditions here and pleads strongly for the adoption of the peaceful and democratic path to socialism. The chief reason for

this is that developments in Russia have made him feel dubious about the outcome of following methods of violence and dictatorship. "The method of the violent revolution and dictatorship," he writes, "might conceivably lead to a socialist democracy; but in the only country [Russia] where it has been tried, it has led to something very different, i.e., to a bureaucratic State, in which democracy does not exist. I should like to take a lesson from history."

This is not the only lesson that J. P. takes from history. In "Ends and Means," adapted from his report as General Secretary to the sixth annual conference of the Socialist Party (as the Congress Socialist Party was now called) held at Nasik in 1948, he talks of some other lessons. Here again he is clearly influenced by the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, whose assassination on January 30, 1948, had come as a great shock to him as to millions in India and abroad. It was at Nasik that the Socialist Party, acting largely under J. P.'s guidance, decided to leave the Congress and function as a separate party, but his emphasis in the report is not on how to capture power as quickly as possible. Also, there is absolutely no rancour or bitterness against the Congress in his report. On the contrary, he reminds his followers that there was much in common between the Congress and the Socialist Party and that the latter should always be happy to join hands with the former for the defence of the State and of democracy and against the forces of communalism and reaction. Proceeding further, J. P. raises the question of ethics in politics and asserts that for the achievement of socialism a strict regard for purity of means is of the highest importance; for nothing but good means will enable us to reach the goal of a good society, which is socialism. He emphatically repudiates the view that all politics is power politics as well as the underlying assumption behind it that the State is the only instrument of social good. "The temptation," he finally warns, "for members of an opposition party to look always to the seats of power is great. We must keep this temptation in check. We must remember today, and never forget it in the coming years, that it would be by constructive work rather than by the tactics of a parliamentary opposition, by positive service rather than by exploiting the mistakes and faults of others, that we would succeed in establishing a democratic socialist society."

In "Democratic Socialism: the Ideal and the Method," adapted from another report as General Secretary to the annual conference of the Socialist Party in 1950, J. P. reiterates the same views. "The aims of the socialist movement which needed to be emphasised," he points out, "were not mere overthrow of the capitalist order and the establishment of a party dictatorship, but the creation of a society of free and equal peoples, a society based on certain values of human and social life: values which could never be sacrificed in the name of theory or the party line or expediciencies of any sort." The formal adherence to Marxism is continued and the plea for democratic methods for achieving socialism is again, as in "The Transition to Socialism," written three years earlier, buttressed by a reference to the Hague speech of Marx, but, as will be clear to all those who read it even cursorily, the spirit pervading this report is Gandhian, not Marxist. It is concluded with an exhortation to the members of the Socialist Party to carry on their work with the detachment that the *Gita* preaches and not to be unduly enthused or distracted by success or failure. "I have no doubt," says J. P., "that the Party will make a great showing at the elections, but it will not make the least difference to me if the Party were completely swept off the board. Indeed, for me such a result would be a further challenge and a spur to greater efforts. I hope all of you will work in that same spirit and the only return that you seek will be the satisfaction that you have done your duty."

v

The elections to which J. P. refers here, the first general elections in independent India, were held in the beginning of 1952, and, somewhat contrary to general expectations, the Socialist Party did not make a great showing at all. Perhaps it had been a mistake for the socialists to leave the Congress. Whatever that might be, J. P. was not disheartened. According to him, one of the chief causes of the failure of the Socialist Party to achieve better results was the presence of a large number of candidates against the Congress in almost every constituency, resulting in endless division of opposition votes. He, therefore, pleaded for a consolidation of like-minded opposition parties and negotiated a merger between the Socialist Party and the Kisan Majdoor Praja Party, which had been formed shortly before the elections when

some of the leaders of the Congress left their old organisation. Thus was born the Praja Socialist Party based on a merger of these two parties. Since the Socialist Party, under J. P.'s leadership, had already been moving towards Gandhism and the strongly Gandhian K.M.P.P., under the leadership of Acharya J. B. Kripalani, was prepared to accept the principles of Democratic Socialism, the merger was in a sense natural and was likely to prove helpful to the functioning of parliamentary democracy as well as to the cause of socialism. In any case, it was not motivated by any desire for cheap political success. For J. P. was not the type of leader to be moved by such considerations or to be affected by the lure for office and power.

The test came soon after the merger. In 1953, Prime Minister Nehru invited J. P. to join the Government along with some of his colleagues. In this connection it might be mentioned that both in personal relationship and in political views J. P. then stood much closer to Nehru than any member of his Cabinet. In 1948, when J. P. was being assailed by many Congress leaders for his charge of negligence against the Government after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru had used the opportunity provided by a broadcast to the nation to pay a public tribute to him. "I have never had any doubt," he had said on that occasion, "about the ability and integrity of Jayaprakash whom I value as a friend and I am sure that a time will come when he will play a very important part in shaping India's destiny." Besides, in the matter of popularity among the masses J. P. stood second only to Nehru. In view of all these it was not unnatural for many to think that J. P.'s inclusion in the Government would place him in a key position there and mark him out as Nehru's heir apparent. But such a prospect held no allurements for J. P. His reaction to Nehru's invitation shows his utter disregard for the usual considerations associated with a political career and his great loyalty to principles. He recognised that Nehru's proposal was bold and unusual, for the Congress stood in no need of a coalition either at the centre or in most of the states. He also thought that it was the common people's wish that their leaders, irrespective of the parties to which they might belong, should join hands together to serve them and make their lot better. But he made it clear that he was not interested in joining Government unless he was sure that it would move

swiftly in the direction of socialism. "Therefore," he wrote to Nehru, "a great deal would depend on how you conceived your own move in asking for our cooperation. If it means only this that a few of us are to be added to your Cabinet and some of the state cabinets to strengthen the Government and your hands in carrying out your present policies, the attempt would not be worth making. But if it means launching upon a bold joint venture of national reconstruction, it might well have been a historic move." For this purpose he suggested a minimum programme based on certain constitutional, legal, administrative, fiscal and economic reforms, the details of which can be found in "Minimum Programme for National Reconstruction." Nehru, though not opposed to these reforms, did not think they could be carried in the next four years as J. P. wanted. So the talks for cooperation between the Congress and the P.S.P. were dropped.

J. P.'s letter also contains a succinct exposition of his political philosophy as it stood a decade ago and in which there has been little change since then, except for his championship of partyless democracy, as a long-term objective. "I assure you," he wrote to Nehru, "our approach to socialism is not doctrinaire, hide-bound or conservative. But I must make one point clear. No matter how empirical and experimental may be our approach, the goals and values of socialism are unalterably fixed before us. Whether we give it or not the name of any ism, we all desire without the shadow of any doubt to create a new society in which there is no exploitation, in which there is economic and social equality, in which there is freedom and well-being for all. Further, these goals for us, or for that matter for any socialist, are not to be achieved in a distant future, but in the soonest possible time." This ardour for socialism was accompanied by an equally strong ardour for Gandhism. "We have all," said J. P., "been deeply influenced by Gandhiji. I do not mind saying that I have been rediscovering him lately and reunderstanding him. I believe he was one of the most vital thinkers of the modern age. I am sure there is a great deal to learn from him today and also tomorrow. I am sure, had he lived, he would have evolved further, as he ceaselessly did, and we would have today a clearer picture of the method he would have followed to achieve the goals that we jointly share . . . I feel sure that the Gandhians and

the Socialists, dropping their respective jargons, must work together."

VI

This ardour for Gandhism, as must be clear from the evolution of J. P.'s mind sketched above, was not entirely new, but had been gradually growing since as early as 1940, if not earlier, in the beginning perhaps unconsciously. As the disenchantment with Marxism, in theory as well as in practice, grew, the Gandhian influence on J. P.'s mind further increased. Thus in "Socialism and Sarvodaya," written in 1951, we find him recommending a careful study of the Sarvodaya Plan for economic development prepared by Gandhian workers a year ago. He describes this Plan as "no wishy washy sentimentalism, but a concrete programme of basic social revolution." After discussing its salient features he expresses the hope that the Gandhian workers and the members of the Socialist Party would join hands to create a new social order on its basis. He finally warns, with great emphasis, that socialism in India would neglect Gandhism only at its peril. In particular, he is fascinated by three aspects of Gandhism: its moral or ethical basis, its great contribution to revolutionary technology in the shape of civil disobedience and satyagraha, and its insistence on political and economic decentralisation.

J. P.'s final break with Marxism came during his self-purification fast, lasting twenty-one days, at Poona in 1952. "It was then," says he, "that a long process of questioning started by the Russian purges came to an end and it became clear that materialism as a philosophical outlook could not provide any basis for ethical conduct and any incentive for goodness." This view was first expressed by him in "Materialism and Goodness," written shortly after the conclusion of the fast, under a slightly different title. Here he remarks that efforts to remake human society are being shipwrecked on "one obdurate rock — human baseness." Society, he emphasises, cannot be good unless the individuals composing it are good. But in a material civilisation man is left with no incentive to be good. "The individual," says J. P., "asks today why he should be good. There is no God, no soul, no morality, no life hereafter, no cycle of birth and death. He is merely an organisation of matter, fortuitously

brought into being and destined soon to dissolve into the infinite ocean of matter. He sees all around him evil succeed — corruption, profiteering, lying, deception, cruelty, power politics, violence. He asks naturally why he should be virtuous. Our social norms of today and the materialist philosophy which rules the affairs of men answer back: he need not. The cleverer he is, the more gifted, the more courageously he practises the new amorality; and in the coils of this amorality the dreams and aspirations of mankind become warped and twisted." Man, therefore, must go beyond the material to find the incentives for goodness. Thus was abandoned the goddess of Dialectical Materialism, at whose shrine J. P. had worshipped, with varying intensity of devotion, for so many years.

This final break with Marxism cleared the way for a fuller understanding and adoption of Gandhism. But the old goals of socialism were not given up. On the contrary, Gandhism was adopted primarily because those goals appeared more likely to be reached through the path of Gandhism. Besides, the goals themselves became nobler and more inspiring. Thus it is not correct to say, as is sometimes done by superficial observers, that J. P. abandoned Socialism when he embraced Gandhism. The fact is that ever since he embraced Gandhism he has been ceaselessly working for the enrichment of the content of socialism and pointing the way to its true realisation.

"The Ideological Problems of Socialism," based on his address to the First Asian Socialist Conference held in Rangoon in 1953, is a good example of his preoccupation with these tasks. Here he begins by saying that socialism is ninety per cent practice and ten per cent theory, and then proceeds to discuss certain problems which, according to him, have arisen out of certain practical, objective situations. The first such problem is the problem of socialist axioms. This problem, he points out, has arisen as a result of the failure of the Soviet leaders to build up a truly socialist society in spite of their success in laying down the economic foundations of such a society, largely because of the amoral philosophy of Marxism and the struggle for power within the ruling party. It has also arisen out of the weakness of human beings, "the weakness of individual man everywhere, his ambition, his selfishness, his stupidity, his hate, his fear." J. P., therefore, feels that people in the socialist movement, whatever

their conception of the path to socialism, whatever their interpretation of theories, must subscribe to certain values, which they would not consider relative in the sense that they could sacrifice them in order to achieve an immediate end. Thus the socialist movement, along with the economic, political and social programmes, must also have a programme based on the question of values.

J. P. then deals with the problem of creating a proper political framework for the development of a socialist society. Here he rejects the system of one-party dictatorship as in the Soviet Union, but also finds drawbacks in the system of parliamentary democracy. In order to do away with these drawbacks he advocates decentralisation of political power so that the people themselves may participate in the management of their affairs. Allied with this problem is the problem of the economic structure for a socialist society. Here J. P. warns that the old belief that nationalisation of industries would solve all problems in the economic field is no longer valid. This is proved by what had happened in the Soviet Union: all the industries there had been nationalised, but this had not led to the establishment of socialism in the true sense of the term. The chief defects of the Soviet economic system, according to J. P., are "centralisation, bureaucratisation, lack of industrial democracy, lack of workers' participation in the management of industry, in short, lack of popular control over the economic process." One solution of this problem is the dispersal of ownership of industries at different levels down to the village organisation and municipal corporation, instead of concentration of ownership of all industries in the hands of the central government. Thus political decentralisation would have to be accompanied by economic decentralisation.

Turning to the technique of struggle for bringing about socialism, J. P. emphatically repudiates the view that though democratic methods might take us forward to a certain extent, at the last stage violence would be necessary in order to complete the socialist revolution. On the contrary, since the objective is the establishment of a democratic society, the means adopted to bring such a society into existence should also be democratic, of course, if such means are available. By democratic methods, however, J. P. does not mean only parliamentary or constitutional methods, but also includes in them mass movements and actions

of a non-violent character, which are unconstitutional yet peaceful. In the end, he takes up the question of relationship between socialist countries, a question brought into prominence by the relationship between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Here he emphasises that the relationship between one socialist country and another must be one of equality and mutual aid. If there has to be any tilting of the balance, it should be in favour of the backward and weaker countries and not in favour of the more developed and stronger ones.

It can easily be seen that here an effort has been made to solve the ideological problems of socialism with the help of Gandhism. The advice given to Indian socialists in the same year is more explicit on this point. In "A Plea for Gandhism," J. P. decries the view that to mix Gandhism and socialism is a sign of ideological confusion and suggests that Gandhism should be used for developing the ideology of socialism in India. According to him, both communism and socialism are facing failures. Communism has ended up in State capitalism and dictatorship. Socialism has become only a parliamentary or legalistic creed. Thus both the methods of violence and of parliamentary action have failed. Gandhism offers the third alternative, that of "revolution by non-violent mass action." There is nothing wrong with the goals of socialism, but these goals are more likely to be reached by following the methods of Gandhism. As J. P. puts it, "Socialism wishes to destroy classes by making one class victorious over the other — which seems to be somewhat illogical. Gandhism wishes to abolish classes by so bringing the classes together that there are no class distinctions left. Socialism ultimately aims at creating a Stateless society, but it wishes to make the State all powerful by making the social revolution itself dependent upon State action. Gandhism, too, like socialism, aims at a Stateless society. But on that account it proceeds more consistently by making the social process as little dependent upon the State as possible. The creation of the Stateless society begins here and now, and is not relegated to a remote and imaginary period in the future."

VII

A concrete basis for this assertion was provided by the *Bhoodan* or land-gift movement being carried on in India since 1951, under the leadership of Acharya Vinoba Bhave, acclaimed all

over the world as the spiritual heir of Mahatma Gandhi. As he proceeded on foot from one village to another, people with big holdings and small enthusiastically responded to his call and offered a portion of their land for distribution among the landless. To J. P., who had already come close to Gandhism, this appeared not merely as a movement for redistribution of land, but as the beginning of a great social and human revolution, and after the general elections of 1952, he plunged wholeheartedly into it. As he moved from village to village with the message of *Bhoodan*, he, too, had an experience similar to Vinoba, and was able to secure donations of thousands of acres of land in course of a few weeks. Here was "revolution by non-violent mass action," taking place before his own eyes. Soon his attachment to this movement and to the philosophy behind it became so strong that he decided to devote all his time and attention to it, to the exclusion of everything else. This decision was announced at the Bodh Gaya Sarvodaya Conference in 1954, and became famous as *Jeevandan*. This involved his withdrawal from the field of power and party politics, in particular, from the leadership of the P.S.P., though not yet from its membership. When it is remembered that J. P. had been the chief source of inspiration to most of the people in the socialist movement in India ever since 1934, and was, next only to Nehru, the most popular and respected political leader in the country, the gravity of this decision can be easily imagined. The fact that only a year ago he had been invited to join Government and that, in spite of his refusal to do so, he was generally considered likely to be invited again and, in any case, as best fitted to succeed Nehru as Prime Minister made this decision an act of great renunciation. It is not, therefore, surprising that Vinoba Bhave, the founder of the *Bhoodan* movement and the chief source of inspiration to all Gandhian workers including J. P. himself, thought it proper to mark the solemnity of this action by rededicating his own life also to the cause of *Bhoodan*, "in response," as he put it, to J. P.'s call.

J. P.'s explanation for this decision is to be found in the chapter entitled "*Jeevandan*," written shortly after the Bodh Gaya Conference. "There is not much of a personal explanation to make," he says in his characteristic fashion, "nor is there need for it. Suffice it to say that the decision I took was not made on

the spur of the moment. I was being slowly driven to it for months past. Nor did the step signify repudiation of the ideals for which I had stood so long. It meant, rather, that I had realised that those ideals could be achieved and preserved better through the *Bhoodan* or the Gandhian way." J. P. also makes it clear that he was not leaving politics as such, but only power and party politics. *Bhoodan* did not wish to create or become a political party in order to capture the State. It aimed, rather, at persuading the people, independently of what the State might or might not do, to carry out a revolution in their own lives and, through that, a revolution in society. It aimed further at creating conditions in which people might manage their affairs directly, without the intermediation of parties and parliaments. Thus, emphasises J. P., "*Bhoodan* is itself an intensely and deeply political movement. A movement that aims so utterly to revolutionise men and society cannot be unpolitical. But it is politics of the kind I have described above — not the politics of parties, elections, parliaments and governments, but politics of the people. Not *rajniti*, but *lokniti*, as Vinoba says." If a person who had performed *jeevandana* belonged to any political party and believed that membership of the party did not conflict with the theory and practice of *Bhoodan*, he might retain such membership. But he would have to keep himself out of all elections and resign any office or elective post he might be holding, though he would be free to cast his vote in any election according to his conscience. Even this would be allowed only during the transitional phase. For the ultimate objective of *Bhoodan* was the creation of a non-party democracy.

This new political system, it need hardly be emphasised, would be animated by the ideals and values of socialism. J. P.'s great worry has been that in the socialist movements in various countries these ideals and values are being forgotten or given a back seat while the doctrines and institutions of socialism and, in some cases, mere economic growth are being given primacy. The result is that the ideals of socialism remain distant dreams even in countries which have socialist governments. His solution for this problem is given in "New Dynamics of Social Change," based on his address to the Second Asian Socialist Conference held at Bombay in 1956. Here he emphasises that the failure to achieve socialism has been caused by the adoption of wrong

means. "All of us agree," he says, "that socialism is a way of life, an attitude of mind, a certain ethical behaviour. What is not so universally recognised is that such a way of life, attitude, behaviour cannot be imposed from above by dictates of the government or by merely nationalising industry and abolishing capitalism. Construction of a socialist society is fundamentally construction of a new type of human being." Thus human reconstruction is the key to socialist reconstruction, and this is beyond the power of the State to achieve. The emphasis in the socialist movement must, therefore, change from political action aiming at the capture of the State to such work of reconstruction. What will be the dynamics of such a movement of human reconstruction? According to J. P., a socialist society is one in which the individual is prepared voluntarily to subordinate his own interest to the larger interest of society. Such a society cannot be created through the old dynamics of social change based on a conflict of self-interests. For it is futile to expect people carrying on a fight actuated by self-interest to ultimately create a society in which selfishness will not rule the lives of men. "Therefore," says J. P., "what is needed is not a dynamics based on a conflict of interests, but one that is based on the values of the society that we all wish to create. What is needed is not so much a movement for the capture of power, but a movement that required that those who participated in it should begin here and now to live the new way of life." It is here that we see the importance of *Bhoodan* in the struggle for socialism. For it is based on this new dynamics of social change and seeks to persuade people to live a life of sharing and to renounce the notion of individual ownership of property. Such a life is already being lived in some of the villages obtained through *Gramdan* (meaning gift of the whole village).

Soon J. P. realised that he must also end the sleeping membership of the P.S.P., thus ending all his association with party politics, a step which he finally took a few months after the second general elections in 1957. This was not an easy decision for him to take, because, as he himself says, it is never easy to cut oneself away from an association of a life time. He, therefore, issued a long statement, which was serialised by newspapers in several issues and also published in the form of a pamphlet, tracing the evolution of his thought and giving the reasons for

this final step. This will be found in the chapter, "From Socialism to Sarvodaya," and merits close attention. "I decided to withdraw from party and power politics," he says there, "not because of disgust or sense of any personal frustration, but because it became clear to me that [such] politics could not deliver the goods, the goods being the same old goals of equality, freedom, brotherhood, peace." The evolution of J. P.'s mind upto 1957, has already been sketched above and need not detain us here. It may, however, be pointed out that while finally bidding good-bye to party politics he again made it clear that he was not leaving all politics, but only politics of a particular type, and that Sarvodaya, too, had its politics. The politics of Sarvodaya, however, could have no party and no concern with power. Rather, its aim would be to see all centres of power abolished. Yet there was no question of any hostility between the old politics and the new, nor could the two be kept completely apart from each other as two unmixable castes. Though all his energies would be bent towards developing the new politics, he would not shut his eyes to what was happening in the sphere of the old. For good or evil the latter did "to some extent" influence the lives of the people. It would be his concern, from the outside, to see that this influence was as salutary as possible.

VIII

While concluding this statement J. P. said that if pressure of work permitted, he would try sometime later to place before the people his suggestions for transforming the old politics into the new. The pressure of work has, of course, always been there and, with his message of Sarvodaya, he has constantly been on the move from one part of the country to another, travelling on foot as well as by all kinds of conveyance, from bullock-carts to aeroplanes, and hardly ever staying continuously at one place even for a fortnight. But in the midst of all this touring and the hardship it entails J. P. has been giving serious thought to the problem of reshaping of Indian democracy and sharing his conclusions with the people from time to time. As early as 1953, we find him raising some serious questions with regard to Indian democracy. In "The Challenge to Democracy" he warns that while economic development proceeded, the problems of economic inequality and exploitation also required attention.

In fact, unlike what happened in Europe, the latter must be given the first priority if democracy was to stand up to the forces of totalitarianism. Thus an immediate transformation of the existing social order was urgently necessary in order to preserve the values of democracy. J. P. also points out that if the challenge of totalitarianism was to be met successfully and the foundations of economic democracy laid here and now, the existing shape of our political democracy would have to be transformed and forms of self-government evolved for the different levels of administration as well as for the different sectors of economy.

Since his resignation from the P.S.P. in 1957, J. P. has applied himself more assiduously to the study of the problems of Indian democracy. His tour of Europe and West Asia in 1958, during which he met a number of leaders and thinkers in those parts of the world and visited institutions of various types, further strengthened his conviction that a copy of European political institutions and methods would not solve India's problems, which must be viewed in India's own context. In fact, J. P. would like some of the ideas of Sarvodaya applied, of course, with suitable modifications, to Europe also. However, he has confined himself largely to India and has made many suggestions for the strengthening and reshaping of democracy here. Some of these suggestions have been for immediate action and some for long-term application, after careful preparation.

"Back to Mahatma Gandhi," being a statement issued in 1958, shortly after his return from Europe and West Asia, contains some of his suggestions for immediate action. Here he reminds us that no nation can be built up without the massive participation of the people and points out that the people of India have not, on the whole, shown any enthusiasm for official programmes of development. "The most important question before the country, therefore," he emphasises, "is not how to strengthen the Government or who should succeed the Prime Minister, but how to awaken to action the sleeping Leviathan — the three hundred and seventy million people of this country." The totalitarian methods for mobilising the people could not be adopted, for they would bring about the end of democracy, and "democracy is too valuable an article to be sacrificed for anything." Long distance appeals to the people from the seats of

power would not do the trick. Nor were the people interested in the usual game of party politics. The only way to move the people was to go back to Mahatma Gandhi: "The leaders of the country must come out of the dream that political power alone would do the trick. They must go to the people — to live and work with them, to serve, guide and help them. They must do all this not to strengthen their parties and gather votes for themselves, but in order that the people should rise and put their heads and hearts and hands to the tasks of national development." If this programme was to be effective and to produce the necessary psychological impact on the nation, it would be essential for the very topmost leaders, including the President and the Prime Minister, to come forward to head this mass movement. They could then draw up a concrete non-partisan programme of reconstruction with which to go to the people. Hundreds of thousands of voluntary workers would be needed to make this venture a success. But if the leaders took the required step, there would be forthcoming more volunteers than might be put to work. J. P.'s second suggestion was that the democratic socialist parties in the country, including the Congress and the P.S.P., should join hands together on the basis of an agreed programme for building up a democratic socialist India, thus removing a basic weakness from the camp of democratic socialism in the country. Needless to add, Sarvodaya, according to J. P., is a higher and truer form of democratic socialism.

The next three chapters contain his suggestions for long-term application. In "Building up From the Village," written in 1959, he emphasises that the village alone can be the natural and sensible habitat of man and the primary unit of social organisation. For man is a social animal and it is necessary for his full development that the primary community in which he lives is such that he is able to establish personal relationships and live in meaningful association with other members of the community. The big towns and cities do not provide facilities for this type of living; they are "human jungles where impersonal relationships govern the life of the individual, who is compelled to quench his thirst for 'society' by forming such artificial things as clubs and other associations. In the city neighbour does not know neighbour and there is no living together." Besides, the values of democracy can be practised far more meaningfully in a small community

than in a large one. Of course, the small communities will have to be integrated into larger units, ultimately including the world community, but they alone can provide the true foundation for democratic life. This may appear as being against the current trend in the direction of urbanisation visible all over the world, including India. But this does not discourage J. P. Men, he reminds us, are endowed with sufficient reason and intelligence to order their life as they like and there is nothing inherent in science which forces them to huddle together in big cities. The drive towards cities is caused by certain economic, social and political factors, and these factors can be modified by human effort. At present life in both city and village is unbalanced. The problem can be solved by the creation of agro-industrial communities where agriculture and industry are both carried together in an inter-dependent and complimentary manner. In such communities there would be no limit to the application of science, except the limits placed by the accepted human values. It is on this foundation that the superstructure of Indian democracy must be raised.

The nature of this superstructure is discussed at great length in "Reconstruction of Indian Polity," written in the same year. Here J. P. makes it clear at the outset that the issue before us is not merely one of a better electoral system than the present one, but "a much more comprehensive one, namely, that of the nature of the polity most suitable for us at the present juncture." He rejects the Western model of democracy as it does not give full scope to the people to participate in the management of their affairs and is based upon an atomised society, the State being made up of an inorganic sum of individuals. This, according to him, is both against the social nature of man and the scientific organisation of society. In its place, he pleads for a model of democracy which is based on an integrated conception of society and allows the fullest possible scope to the individual to participate in the management of his affairs, without the intermediation of political parties. As J. P. views it, the existing situation is that the parties have become real arbiters of the people's fate, but the latter do not exercise any control over them. Even the enrolled members of the parties have no say either in policy-making or in inner administration. This party system is productive of many evils: "Party rivalries . . . give

birth to demagoguery, depress political ethics, put a premium on unscrupulousness and aptitude for manipulation and intrigue. Parties create dissensions where unity is called for, exaggerate differences where they should be minimised. Parties often put party interests over the national interests. Because centralisation of power prevents the citizen from participating in government, the parties, that is to say, small caucuses of politicians, rule in the name of the people and create the illusion of democracy and self-government." But it is not the party system that is the main culprit, but parliamentary democracy, which gives rise to it and which cannot work without it. J. P., therefore, pleads for the replacement of parliamentary democracy by a new kind of polity, more consistent with India's own traditions and with the true nature of man and community. This he calls communitarian or partyless democracy.

The problem of devising a new polity, however, is part of the larger problem of social reconstruction. As J. P. puts it: "Modern industrialism and the spirit of economism that it has created, a spirit which weighs every human value on the scales of profit and loss and so-called economic progress, have disintegrated human society and made man an alien among his fellow menThe problem of present-day civilisation is social integrationThe problem is to put man in touch with man, so that they may live together in meaningful, understandable, controllable relationships. In short, the problem is to recreate the human community." The essential attributes of a true community are sharing, participation and fellowship: "a feeling of unity in the midst of diversity; a sense of freedom within the framework of accepted social responsibilities; differentiation of functions converging to the single goal of the good of the community and its members." Such a community may or may not have existed in the past, but it must become the ideal of future social reconstruction. "Only then," emphasises J. P., "will the social nature of man and the great humanist ideals of modern civilisation find fulfilment. Only then, too, will there be true democracy."

At the base of the new social organisation will be the local or primary communities, neither so small that a balanced development of communal life and culture becomes difficult, nor so large that life in them becomes ~~too~~ personalised. They will be neither rural nor urban, but agro-industrial, based on a balance

of agriculture and industry, making full use of science and technology to serve their ends and no more. The existing big cities would have to be reorganised and made federations of smaller-sized communities. Where this is not possible, they will have to be endured, care being taken to see that they do not become bigger and no new big cities come up. Just as a number of families come together to build a common life at the level of the primary community, so the primary communities will come together and cooperate among themselves to tackle common problems and build the regional community. A number of regional communities will in their turn join together to form the district community. The district communities will federate to form the provincial communities, and the latter will join hands to form the national community. As we proceed from the base upwards, there will be less and less to do for the bigger communities, so that, when we reach the level of the national community, it will deal only with such matters as defence, foreign relations, currency and inter-state coordination.

The political structure of the community must correspond to its social structure and rise storey by storey from the foundation, which will consist of "self-governing, self-sufficient, agro-industrial, urbo-rural local communities." The existing villages and townships can be converted into such communities if sincere efforts are made in this direction. The development of the rest of the political structure, however, need not wait till this task is completed. The work must begin at all levels simultaneously, otherwise it will not succeed at any level. The highest political institution of the local community should be the village assembly — *Gram Sabha* — with all the adults of the community as its members. The executive — *Panchayat* — should be selected by general consensus of opinion in the *Sabha*, without anybody standing for election for any office. The *Sabha* and the *Panchayat* should be given responsibility to manage things that really matter. For instance, it should be their duty to ensure that no one in the village goes without food, clothing and shelter, every child receives primary education and everyone receives primary medical care. The next level of the political structure will be that of the regional community, with the *Gram Panchayats* integrated into the *Panchayat Samiti*. Similarly the *Panchayat Samitis* of a district will be integrated into the District Council,

the District Councils integrated into the State Assembly, and the State Assemblies integrated into the National Parliament. Thus the political institutions at each level will be an integration of the institutions at the lower level. There will be indirect instead of direct election.

The issue, however, is not merely one of strengthening local self-government or of introducing indirect elections. "It would be wrong to suppose," warns J. P., "that if 'local bodies' were given more powers and the direct system of election were replaced with an indirect one, and the rest of the social organisation were left as it is, the resultant would be the kind of polity that is being advocated here. The polity herein suggested is not a graft on the existing body of society, but an organic part of a radically transformed social order." Such a polity cannot be built in a day and there will have to be a period of transition. To begin with, elections should be so conducted that political parties do not play any role in them upto the district level. Even at the state and national levels the candidates must be selected by the people themselves and not by the parties, which during the period of transition, may be allowed to support particular candidates after their selection by the people. Thus will the role of the parties in our political processes be gradually reduced and that of the people increase, leading eventually to the establishment of communitarian or partyless democracy.

The problems of the transition from the old polity to the new are dealt with more fully in "Swaraj for the People," published in 1961. Here J. P. stresses the urgency of the task of enabling the people directly to participate in the management of their affairs as far as possible. "The most striking fact that has emerged from the working of ten years of our Constitution," he says, "is that the people of this country, that is to say, the twenty crores of voters, have felt rather left out of it all. They have no doubt had the opportunity of participating in two general elections, but beyond that transient contact with the working of democracy, they have had nothing further to do with it. It is very common to hear the remark made by the common people even in the countryside that though Swaraj came, it had not come to them." The problem, therefore, is how to take Swaraj to the people.

J. P. expresses satisfaction at the fact that a beginning in this direction has already been made by introducing *Panchayati Raj* or democratic decentralisation in several states, but points out that certain conditions must be fulfilled before this can become the base of a truly participatory democracy. These conditions are education of the people, in the widest sense of the term, which might be undertaken jointly by government and non-government agencies; refraining by political parties from interfering with the institutions of *Panchayati Raj* for the purpose of using them as a jumping ground to climb to power; real devolution of power to the institutions of *Panchayati Raj* and not a make-belief; granting of independent minimum financial resources to the institutions of *Panchayati Raj* at every level; exercise of real authority by the institutions of *Panchayati Raj* over the civil servants under their charge, who should be held fully accountable to them; and making the *Gram Sabha*, consisting of the entire adult population of the village, the bottom tier of the *Panchayati Raj*, with the *Gram Panchayat* serving as its executive and implementing its decisions. As for elections to the village *panchayats*, J. P. reiterates the view that they should be held without contest. "Self-government through faction-fighting," he warns, "will not be self-government, but self-ruination. Let it be remembered that the village is a primary, face-to-face community where the people are physically thrown together and have to share their joys and sorrows. This village . . . is a disrupted community. It would be a tragedy and a mockery of democracy if the latter were to be made an instrument of further disruption." For the success of *Panchayati Raj* it is also necessary that its day-to-day working is put outside the purview of the state governments. The necessary laws and rules must, of course, be framed by the state legislatures, but after this has been done their working should be placed under the care of a non-political, autonomous body headed by a person not belonging to the civil service. Such a body might be called *Panchayati Raj Commission*.

Further, J. P. is of the view that while the attempt to establish *Panchayati Raj* is a step in the right direction, it is not adequate by itself. If the edifice of democracy has to be made really strong and invulnerable, its top layers must be built into the foundational structure. *Panchayati Raj* upto the district level and Party Raj,

resting on nothing more solid than the amorphous mass of individual and disparate voters, at the state and national levels will represent "a very unhappy mixture of two different principles and processes of democracy that, like water and oil, will not mix." The differences between the two systems are thus summed up by J. P.: "The system that rests on individual voters has invariably a tendency towards concentration of power at the top, while the other system tends towards dispersal of power; in the former, organised parties that are run from above by small and powerful *elites* play the decisive role; in the latter, communities and communal representative bodies working from below exert the decisive influence; in the former, again, the representatives elected by the unorganised voters are not and cannot be under their control, in the latter the electing bodies exercise a continuous influence over the representatives they send to the higher levels; in the former system the people's participation is limited to casting of votes, in the latter there is direct participation of the whole people through the *Gram Sabha* and fairly close participation through the higher representative bodies; in the former system elections are expensive, in the latter just the opposite; the former requires mass media of propaganda and involves unhealthy psychological and emotional excitement, in the latter these evils are reduced to the minimum; in the former most voters are more unlikely to understand the issues which are placed before them than in the latter in which the voters at each level are expected to be well acquainted with the problems that they have to deal with." In view of such fundamental differences between the two systems, if *Panchayati Raj* stops at the district level and above that Party Raj rules supreme, the people will feel cheated and disillusioned and will consider the continuance of this illogical situation as the result of the reluctance of the politicians to part with power. Hence J. P.'s plea not to terminate *Panchayati Raj* at the district level, but to extend it right upto New Delhi. This cannot, of course, be done immediately, but should clearly be set as the goal and sincere efforts made to reach it as speedily as possible.

In what manner should *Panchayati Raj* be extended to higher levels? Here J. P. suggests a procedure slightly different from that suggested by him in "Reconstruction of Indian Polity," two years earlier. In the latter he had suggested that each lower

level should elect the immediately higher through the system of indirect election. But on second thoughts he has changed this view, as indirect elections might encourage parochialism and retard the growth of a national outlook among all the citizens. Besides, such a system might be more liable to be corrupted by moneyed interests, as the number of electors would be small, except at the lowest level. He, therefore, suggests a method of election which would be direct, yet so organised as to give the institutions of *Panchayati Raj* at every level a definite role in it. Thus it will be possible to have the advantages of direct election without affecting the organic nature of the new polity. The role of the political parties should be restricted as far as possible and the people enabled to select their own candidates for election through popularly constituted Electoral Councils. Every constitutional and educational device should be adopted to encourage these councils to set up no more than one candidate for every seat, thus avoiding contest. For it is necessary for the fulfilment of democracy — no matter what its kind — that its processes are “as little divisive as possible, or, to put it positively, as cohesive and unitive as possible.”

IX

The political structure sketched above will require for its base a new kind of economic structure. While the satisfaction of the material needs of man will be its objective, it will not endeavour to satisfy the insatiable hunger for more and yet more which modern industrialism — capitalist, socialist and communist — has created. J. P. strongly pleads for this view in “Reconstruction of Indian Polity.” “I believe,” he says there, “that for man really to enjoy liberty and freedom and to practise self-government, it is necessary voluntarily to limit his wants. Otherwise, the greed for more and yet more will lead to mutual conflict, coercion, spoliation, war; and also to a system of production that will be so complex as to bind democracy hand and foot and deliver it to a bureaucratic oligarchy.” If the present science of Economics comes in the way of the development of an economy based on a voluntary limitation of wants, a new science of Economics may have to be created, together with new methods of planning and new techniques of industrial organisation.

These new methods and techniques come in for more detailed discussion in "Swaraj for the People." Here J. P. reiterates his view that the old belief of socialists that nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange would automatically usher in economic democracy is no longer valid. In fact, the experience of communist countries has shown that even the complete nationalisation of all these means results not in economic democracy, but in the most rigorous economic dictatorship, giving rise to new forms of economic exploitation and inequality. The only way out is economic decentralisation. What would be the essential features of a decentralised economy in India? According to J. P., such an economy must be a small-machine and labour-intensive economy, care being taken to constantly improve the efficiency and productivity of the small machine without adding much to its cost. Secondly, there must be regional surveying and planning so that the resources of a particular region might be utilised to the full to satisfy the needs of that region, though, of course, surpluses of one region should continue to be exchanged for those of other regions. Thirdly, there must be launched a programme of rural industrialisation so that every village, or at least every small group of villages, is developed as an agro-industrial community, based on an organic blending of agriculture and industry. Fourthly, the organisational pattern of decentralised industry should be such as to keep it free from both bureaucratisation and exploitation. Fifthly, the institutions of *Panchayati Raj* should play an important part in the development of such an economy.

J. P. makes it clear that his objective here is not to preserve the traditional methods of production. On the contrary, what he is suggesting is, in fact, a most modern type of economy, the like of which does not exist and has not existed anywhere and the creation of which would require a new machine technology as well as a new socio-economic technology. He also emphasises that he has been pleading for a decentralised economy not only because it would be democratic, but also because it would bring immediate benefit to the masses by offering employment on a mass scale and producing wealth in a manner that would ensure its wide distribution and make 'wage goods' immediately available to ordinary consumers. J. P. again lays stress on this practical but neglected aspect of planning in "Whither India?",

adapted from his presidential address to the Thirteenth All India Sarvodaya Conference in 1961. Here he expresses satisfaction at the fact that as a result of the two Five Year Plans there has been an increase in the national income of as much as forty per cent, but points out that there has been no corresponding improvement in the condition of the common people. The economic experts and planners of the Government, in their enthusiasm for copying the methods and techniques of economic organisation prevailing in Europe, did not pay any heed to ideas of regional self-sufficiency and economic decentralisation, in spite of frequent reminders and warnings by Gandhian thinkers and leaders. The result has been disastrous. "The experts and the planners," says J. P., "had had it all their own way. But the obstinate facts of poverty, unemployment, starvation . . . persist shamelessly to stare us in the face. We are prepared to admit that all our fanciful theories are wrong or out of date and that by insisting upon humanisation of economics we are acting as sheer romantics. But the people want food and clothing and want to live differently from animals. How are the planners to give all that to the people?" According to J. P., there is no other way to do so except to launch "a massive programme of rural industrialisation."

x

This pleading was not entirely without result. Discussions took place in the Planning Commission on the basis of notes on rural industrialisation prepared by J. P. and it was decided to start pilot projects in various parts of the country. Thus our planners seem at last to be realising the importance of rural industrialisation, if not for building up a new society and polity, at least for alleviating the sufferings of the poor by providing them with employment. Something similar has happened with regard to elections to the village *Panchayat*. Two major political parties of the country, the Congress and the P.S.P., have agreed that they should not be conducted on a party basis. The Kamaraj Plan, too, under which several leaders have left the Government to work among the people through the Congress organisation or otherwise, though somewhat vitiated in implementation, is essentially based on a partial adoption, in a slightly modified form and with more limited objectives, of the suggestion first

made by J. P. five years ago in his statement entitled "Back to Mahatma Gandhi." These instances, by no means exhaustive, should serve as eye-openers to those people, in India as well as abroad, who, ever since J. P.'s withdrawal from the field of party and power politics, have shown a tendency to consider his ideas as visionary and unpractical. Of course, he may appear to have acted in an unpractical way by leaving the arena of political contests in spite of his great mass popularity, his unchallenged sway over the second largest party in the country, his close personal contact with several important leaders in other parties, including the Congress, and his figuring most prominently and persistently in public as well as private discussions about the next Prime Minister. But on that account all his ideas should not be treated as unpractical. Some of them have already been accepted by the ruling party and the Government, and some more may be accepted in the future. This is not to say that his suggestions are not idealistic or that all of them, particularly those relating to the communitarian or partyless democracy, can be easily or immediately implemented — he himself does not make such a claim — but only to stress that they deserve careful consideration by all those interested in building up a new India and in strengthening the foundations of democracy here.

In fact, although his writings, especially his two treatises on democracy, would do credit to any great scholar or thinker and are sure to find a prominent place in the history of political thought in the twentieth century, J. P.'s interest in the problems he discusses is inspired by practical and not purely academic considerations. It is not primarily as a theoretician, but as a leader and a statesman, that he approaches the problems of democracy. It is also possible that in times of special need or urgency he may take a more direct hand in shaping public affairs than he is at present doing by engaging in *Bhoodan* activities, writing on problems of social and political reconstruction, issuing statements on important and controversial questions of the day, talking to political leaders, and addressing the people in towns as well as villages in all parts of the country. This will become clear from a careful perusal of "Whither India?" Referring to the disinterest of Sarvodaya workers in politics, J. P. significantly observes: "It means, of course, that we do not belong to any political party, that we do not and shall not take part, directly or

indirectly, in any political contest for position or power. But does it also mean that we are not concerned with what is happening in the political field; with the working of our democracy and its various institutions? If democracy were to be in peril, if there were danger of political chaos, of dictatorship, shall we sit back smugly and twiddle our thumbs on the ground that we have nothing to do with politics? Perhaps it is not understood clearly that our policy not to be involved in party and power politics is meant precisely to enable us to play a more effective and constructive part in moulding the politics of the country."

In the end, a word to J. P. In "Reconstruction of Indian Polity," he remarks that while the old faith that State ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange plus planning would bring about socialism has been falsified, a new faith has not yet been created to take the place of the old. "For this," he says further, "the socialists will have to go to the pre-Marxian socialist idealists, the philosophical Anarchists; to Tolstoy, Ruskin and Morris; to the post-Marxian social idealists; to Gandhi and Vinoba. The 'communities of work' of France have a great deal to teach the socialists; and so have the *kibbutzim* of Israel and some of the *gramdan* villages of India. The socialists must also take from Marx what is still valid and from science the best it has to offer. This task will require a vast capacity for moral and intellectual synthesis, but the task has to be undertaken if socialism has to recapture its pristine inspiration and idealism. Marx, as Lenin pointed out, had synthesised German philosophy, French socialism and British classical economics to create his grand and noble structure of thought. Another moral and intellectual genius must arise to perform anew a similar creative act of synthesis so that socialism might become a faith for the future rather than one of the 'wasms' of the past." It may be humbly pointed out that no person, by temperament, training and experience, can be more suited to perform this task than J. P. himself. As a matter of fact, the rough outlines of such a synthesis, which will essentially be a synthesis of Socialism, Sarvodaya and Democracy, are already there in "Reconstruction of Indian Polity." What is needed is that he severely curtails or regulates his touring and other activities connected with the *Bhoodan* and allied movements (though not completely end them), and concentrates for some years on reflection and writing.

In view of his deep attachment to several noble causes and incessant demand on his time from all parts of the country and, increasingly, from various parts of the outside world, this may not be easy to manage. But if he can somehow do so, there is no doubt that he will be able eventually to complete what he has begun in the "Reconstruction." He will thus perform the great creative work of synthesis of which he is here speaking and thereby give humanity a faith for the future.

BIMLA PRASAD

PART ONE

MARXISM AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM

1936

I. The Foundation of Socialism*

IT is often remarked, and not always by the uninformed, that there are so many types of Socialism that it is difficult to tell what is meant by the term.

It is true that there have been, historically, different schools of Socialism and mutually conflicting socialist parties. But I think it would not be wrong to say that in recent years, especially owing to the impact of the world crisis and the rise of Fascism, there has been a growing unity in socialist thought; and today more than ever before it is possible to say that there is only one type, one theory of Socialism—Marxism.

It should be remembered, moreover, that the greater part of the differences between various groups of socialists was, and is, based not on the nature and definition of Socialism, but on the method and tactics of changing the present capitalist society into a socialist one. So far only communists have vindicated their theory of tactics by their great and remarkable success in Russia. The proponents of the other methods are today everywhere in the trough of failure.

I am not concerned here with questions of tactics. My object is simply to explain the basic principle of Socialism, the domain of which is too extensive to be covered in a short chapter of a book of this nature. I shall be satisfied if I am able to impress on the reader's mind, just the principle on which, as a foundation, the edifice of Socialism must be raised.

The first thing to remember about Socialism is that it is a system of social reconstruction. It is not a code of personal conduct; it is not something which you and I can practice. Nor is

* *Why Socialism?* (Ch. I), published by the Congress Socialist Party.

it a hot-house growth. When we speak of applying Socialism to India, we mean the reorganisation of the whole economic and social life of the country: its farms, factories, schools, theatres. No doubt, it is possible to run the life of a single village or the business of a single factory on socialist lines. But that would not be Socialism. The picture cast by a prism on the laboratory wall has seven colours, but it is not the rainbow of the skies.

It follows, therefore, that those who desire to construct a socialist society should have the power and the requisite sanction behind them to do so. No group of idealists can build up Socialism unless it has power in its hands.

What is meant by power? If one looks at the world of today, one finds that the instrument through which groups, parties, individuals attempt to enforce their plans, their schemes, over the community, the nation, is the *State*. Whether it is a constitutional party, like the Labour Party of England, a revolutionary party, like the Bolshevik Party of Russia, a fascist party like that of Hitler in Germany, it seeks in every case to *capture the State*. When the State is in your hands, you can legislate, you can use the whole magnificent apparatus of propaganda and education that modern science has made available; you can enforce your will. And if there is resistance, you can use the coercive arm of the State—the police and the army—to crush it. Behind every piece of legislation lies the State's power to persuade and, ultimately, to coerce.

No party in the world of today can build up Socialism unless it has the machinery of the State in its hands: whether it has come to acquire it through the will of the electorate or by a *coup d'état* is irrelevant to our discussion just now.

As a corollary to this, we can state another proposition. A party in power, i.e., in possession of the State, can always establish Socialism, provided it has either of two things: sufficient power of coercion to put down resistance or sufficient popular support to be able to deal with opposition. Both in the end mean the same thing. The coercive powers of a socialist State, if they exist at all, are bound to be derived from popular support—the “unpopular” support, that is, the support of the classes of property, being rather thrown on the opposite side.

I have said that a party in possession of the State and with the means to keep itself there, can, if it so desired, create a socialist

heaven on the earth. What must it exactly do to begin doing this? Must it haul up all the "exploiters" and pot-bellied capitalists and have them shot? Must Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, supposing he became the Premier or President of Socialist India, line up the Taluqdars of the U.P. and have them blown up to bits? Must he seize the treasures of the *rajahs* and the *mahajans* and distribute them to the people—equally, of course? Must he turn over the Tata Iron Works, for instance, to the workers employed there, and leave them to make as good or bad a business of it as they please? Must he split up all the land in the country, divide the total acreage by the total population, and hand over a little plot to each individual? Will that be Socialism?

No. Socialism is something more sensible, more scientific, more civilized than all that.

What, then, must Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru do?

We can find the answer to this question, if we take a look at the society we live in—here and abroad.

The first thing that strikes us is the strange and painful fact of inequalities—inequality of rank, of culture, of opportunity: a most disconcertingly unequal distribution of the good things of life. Poverty, hunger, filth, disease, ignorance—for the overwhelming many. Comfort, luxury, culture, position, power—for the select few. In *our* country as much as anywhere else; perhaps more here than elsewhere. Where, indeed, will you find such contrasts of wealth and poverty, of despotism and degradation as in unhappy India?

This fact of inequalities, with all its brood of social consequences, is the central problem of our society. To the solution of this problem have been directed the best efforts of the best of men in all ages, in our age more than in any other. Charity, philanthropy, utopias, appeals to the more fortunate to be kind to the less fortunate, denunciation of the rich and exaltation of poverty, curtailment of wants—these have been the common reactions to this evil of inequalities.

The socialist's reaction is very different from these. His approach to this problem is like that of the physician to disease. He seeks to discover the root cause of the malady. He does not take the fact of inequalities for granted and then proceed to level them up. He endeavours rather to tackle the problem at the source so as to check the very *growth* of inequalities.

In tracing the source of this evil, the socialist first of all encounters the biologist. He is told that human beings are not born equal, as the democrat loves to repeat, but very much unequal. From birth we are said to differ in innate capacity—both in quantity and quality. This of course is true and undeniable. Even a behaviourist will have no difficulty in admitting the biologist's claim.

But let us see how this fact of biological inequalities affects the socialist's examination of social inequalities. He admits that the normal bell-shaped curve of probabilities applies as much to human abilities as to any other phenomenon. In society there is at one end a small group of geniuses and at the other an equally small group of half-wits and idiots, while in the centre is the vast majority of humanity with more or less equal capabilities.

These biological differences appear in numerous social forms. We get, for example, inequalities in learning and achievements in the arts and sciences. Then we have inequalities of rank, of wealth, of power, of opportunity. Now, the socialist's protest never was against the fact that Tagores and Ramans exist in society. If anything, he is glad that they do exist. He regrets, however, that hundreds of potential Tagores and Ramans go unknown to the grave owing to the fact that they are denied opportunities for self-development. The evil of inequalities was never said to lie, either by socialists or others, in the fact that only a few are gifted by nature to become great poets and scientists. The socialist's plea is that the evil lies in the inequalities of the second set enumerated above, viz., inequalities of rank, wealth, etc. In our modern world, where property has become a universal social sanction, it is the unequal distribution of property that is the core of the social problem.

Wherefore, then, this unequal distribution of wealth? It may be suggested that here too biology does the trick. The clever ones among us make better businessmen and therefore grow richer than the others. Supposing we grant this for the moment; does it explain the wealth of those who came to acquire it by inheritance? In the case of inherited wealth it is obvious, of course, that biological qualities play no part at all. The idiotic heir of a millionaire would just as well inherit the millions of his ancestor as he would if he were a genius. Here it is obvious that it is merely the existence of a social standard, custom, that

is responsible for the fortunes of heirs. Change that custom, and millions of people who are wealthy today would suddenly grow poor.

But let us take the case of those who have made their own fortunes. Have they not done so because of their superior ability? That to be a successful businessman a certain type and degree of ability is required cannot be denied. But would it not be rather strange that divine dispensation should have ordained that only one type of human ability should be productive of wealth, while all others should acquire wealth only at the will of the wealthy? A great mathematician may be the greatest of his time but his researches, while they bring him immortality perhaps, do not in themselves mean wealth for him. Has not his genius even as much value as that of an ordinary businessman who makes money by following certain set rules of the game? A scientist, no matter how clever, does not make any money from his laboratory, unless, of course, he turns a businessman. The businessman's laboratory alone seems to be productive of wealth.

Let us see what this laboratory is and how wealth is created and accumulated.

In the world we have men on one side and nature on the other. All wealth is in the womb of nature. Man must work upon nature in order to appropriate from it what he wants. All things of use which he does appropriate constitute his wealth. Thus the source of wealth is nature and the agency which creates it is human labour. This is the rock bottom of all economics.

How does wealth accumulate? It is obvious that if men appropriated from nature just as much as was required for their bare existence, nothing would be left for accumulation. The amount of wealth that man can extract from nature depends upon his productive power, i.e., the nature of his tools and his methods of work. For accumulation to be physically possible, therefore, the productive powers of man should be so advanced that he may be able to produce more than he needs for his subsistence. This is the fundamental basis of accumulation. When the arts of hunting, fishing, planting have advanced enough to yield more than is necessary for the lowest existence, accumulation becomes possible.

Now in a society in which the arts of production have advanced beyond the subsistence level, each member would be

able to accumulate a certain amount of wealth, provided he was free to work for himself, owned his own tools, had free access to nature and was able to keep all he produced for himself. The maximum rate of accumulation would depend upon the difference between maximum individual production and minimum individual consumption. It might very well happen that some families instead of consuming the minimum used up all they produced. They will not be able to accumulate any thing. They, however, will not starve, because we have assumed that the stage of production has not only reached but passed the subsistence level.

In this society there may also be some others who are exceptionally intelligent. They may naturally produce a little more than the rest and, if they are thrifty too, they might save comparatively more. On the other hand, people of inferior intelligence might save very little or nothing at all. But in such a society every able-bodied person would be able to accumulate wealth or, at least, support himself, if, to repeat the provisos stated above, he is free to work for himself, owns his tools, has free access to nature and is the master of all that he produces.

Let us turn from this hypothetical society to our own. We find that the methods of production—both agricultural and industrial—are so advanced that a man can easily produce much more than he can consume, even at the present standard of living, which is naturally higher than the primitive stage of our hypothetical society. The Indian cultivator, in spite of his comparatively old-fashioned methods and tools, can produce much more than is necessary for him to live on. Yet we find that millions of our people do not get even a square meal a day. At the same time we also find that there are many people who have not only got their wants satisfied, but who are also enjoying a high degree of comfort. How have these conditions of dire want on one side and ease and luxury on the other been created ?

Let us take the case of the poor first. Considering the advanced productive powers of our present society, it should have been possible for every Indian not only to support himself but also to accumulate something. But, as a matter of fact, most Indians are not supporting themselves. Why ? Because the provisos which were mentioned above have nearly all disappeared. The people do not all work for themselves ; they have no longer free

access to nature ; in many cases they are not the masters of their tools ; they are not able to keep all they produce for themselves. How all this has come about would be too long a story to tell. That the fact is true all of us can see.

The poverty of our people, then, is due to the fact that the means of production, i.e., tools, materials, land, etc., are no longer in their hands. They have to pay for most of them, and the more they pay for them the less their own share of the produce and the greater their poverty. A large proportion of them have not even the means to pay for them ; there is nothing that they can do except to sell their labour to others. If the means of production were freely available to each individual, there would be no poverty, unless the population rose to such an extent that at the present stage of the productive powers the means of production were unable to produce sufficient wealth to meet the needs of the people. This certainly is not the case in India yet, in spite of its large population.

Now let us take the case of the rich. How is it that some have come to acquire thousands and lakhs of times as much wealth as the poor ? An individual, no matter how clever, cannot possibly produce, at any stage of productivity, thousands of times more than others who are using the same means of production. The great riches of the rich are not obviously their own production. It is impossible for such disproportion in the productivity of men, living in the same society, to exist. We have pointed out above that there is no other way of creating wealth except by working upon nature, and that the only way of accumulating wealth is by producing more than one consumes. The limits to production are set by the stage of development the arts of production have reached in a society. This is true even in the complicated societies of the West, where production is so mechanized. There we find, as we do here too though not to the same extent, that the means of production, particularly of industrial production, have developed so much that they cannot be used any more by individuals working independently. But this in no way invalidates my argument. If all the people participating in production took their share of what they produced, the situation would still be the same as in our hypothetical society. Each member of society would accumulate a fair amount of wealth and there would be no poverty nor concentration of too much wealth in a few hands.

How then, have the great fortunes of present society been made? It may be urged that they are the result of patient saving by industrious people. The answer is that thrift and industry have not been known to travel for generations in the same family line, nor in themselves have they been found to result in excessive wealth. None of the fortunes of today, especially those founded on industry, has a hoary ancestry. The secret of wealth does not lie in the peculiar talents or blood of the wealthy.

Our analysis of the process of accumulation furnishes the secret. Suppose that in a society in which production has passed the subsistence level, an individual manages to employ, say, ten other individuals to work for him and pays them only what they require for their subsistence and keeps the surplus for himself. That individual would be accumulating wealth ten times as fast as others who are working for themselves; and he would soon become a very wealthy man. It should be obvious that the volume of his private wealth would increase with the number of individuals he employs.

Suppose again that in the same society another individual came somehow to establish a monopoly over some part of nature, say, land. By virtue of that monopoly he does not allow anyone to work upon that land, i.e., to cultivate it, unless a share of the produce is vouchsafed him. He too will begin to grow richer than the rest, and his riches will grow in proportion to the land he "owns" and the tribute he exacts from those who till his land. Likewise with other natural resources.

This is the true secret of the inequality of wealth and the true meaning of exploitation.

The question may be asked here, why should any individual work for any one else and be thus cheated out of part of his produce when he could easily work for himself and keep the whole of it to himself? A full treatment of this question will involve a survey of the entire social and political history of mankind. Briefly, the answer is that there is no reason why any one should do it and that, as a matter of fact, in history no one has done it except under compulsion.

In all human societies where the open frontier existed so that any one could clear the jungle and cultivate his own plot, no one worked for another, except for mutual benefit. The gifts of nature, however, were the first to become the monopoly of the

few. This monopoly in the earliest days was based on sheer and naked force. A group of people arose practically everywhere who established an exclusive ownership over nature, particularly over land, and subjugated others to slavery, serfdom, or to the status of just "free" rent-payers.

In industry, as long as it remained at a level where independent individual production was possible, industrial exploitation and, therefore, differences in industrial incomes were slow to arise. As, however, production advanced and cities grew, slaves or even individual craftsmen were made to work together for a master, thus creating inequalities in industrial incomes also. The real and rapid growth of industrial fortunes dates, however, from the time steam power (the Industrial Revolution) came into being, making possible a much larger employment, i.e., exploitation, of workers.

It may be urged that there are in society classes of men who neither employ labour nor receive rent or any other tribute, but who nevertheless are quite rich—richer in some cases than the men of the other two classes. For instance, there are traders, speculators, bankers, etc. These neither produce wealth themselves nor do they directly exploit the labour of others engaged in producing wealth. Whatever may be the immediate source of the wealth of these classes, this much at least should be clear that it too must come somehow from the total wealth created in the community.

Wealth, as we showed, is created by labour and except that portion of it which goes to the producers, it becomes the property of the employing and exploiting classes. But these classes naturally cannot use themselves all the things that their workers have created. These must be sold and other things bought. Thus traders and speculators come into being and because goods must be sold in order to enable the manufacturers to buy materials for further manufacture and sale, the latter yield, both as buyers and sellers, some part of the surplus wealth that has fallen into their hands to the traders and speculators. Likewise with bankers. They are said to earn interest on the money they lend. But the interest is created in the process of manufacture and is paid out of the same fund of surplus wealth. Profits, interests, middlemen's commissions,—all these come from the same common fund: the fund created by the surplus wealth appropriated by

manufacturers and those who possess a monopoly in the means of production. Money in itself cannot make money, nor can any sort of financial and commercial manipulation do so. The whole game of capitalist business consists in the attempt of the various parts of it to appropriate as large a share of the surplus wealth as possible. Herein lies the secret of all capitalist competition and all the subtle and complicated business practices that are so laboriously taught in the universities.

To repeat, for it will bear repetition, it is the wealth that accumulates in the hands of those who own the means of production, by virtue of their exploitation of others' labour, that constitutes the general fund from which, as a result of the working of the economic organization, other groups draw their share. It is wrong to believe that these "middlemen" in any manner "create" wealth. Their "money-making" merely means diverting as great a share of the total accumulated wealth as possible in their own direction. Even the professions, lawyers, physicians, etc., fill their ladles from this same common bowl, though in their case, part of their share comes from that portion of the total wealth also that goes to the actual producers—the workers, peasants, etc.

To sum up, the root cause of inequalities of wealth lies in the fact that the gifts of nature, which yield wealth to men, and the instruments of production have come to be privately owned by people for their own benefit. This leads to economic exploitation, i.e., the withholding from the workers of all that they produce except what they need to live on at a given standard of living. This takes place either directly, as when labourers are employed to produce goods for the manufacturer, or indirectly, as when men rent land or any other natural resource, for their livelihood.

The earliest manner in which these sources and instruments (collectively termed "means" in socialist writings) of production passed into private hands was through force. This is termed "primitive accumulation". The surplus wealth thus accumulated in the hands of those who were able to use force went on multiplying through the ages through the institution of slavery and indentured labour, till the loot from India and the inventions of certain German-Englishmen combined to usher in the Industrial Revolution. This became *par excellence* the age of

exploitation, because it made the employment of unheard of masses of labourers in single manufactures possible.

Such being the causes of the present inequalities of wealth, it should not be difficult to imagine what form the socialist solution of this problem would take.

Theoretically speaking, two solutions are possible, each if practicable resulting in a just, equitable and happy society. The first solution is so to reconstitute society that every individual may be free to work for himself—he may either cultivate his own land (without the payment of any tribute to anyone) or work with his own tools in his workshop. No one may be allowed to possess larger means of production than he can possibly make use of with his own hands.

It should be clear that in order to change the existing order into the one described above very drastic changes will have to be made and great restrictions will have to be imposed. For such a society to work smoothly a degree of social control and discipline would be required which one does not associate with societies whose economic organisation is so primitive. Such a society, moreover, cannot have railways and telegraphs—in fact, nothing but the most primitive forms of transport and communication. From a military standpoint such a society, exposed to the rapacity of highly industrialized countries, would be extremely weak and an easy prey to them. From the point of view of standard of living, the people, especially in India where there is such a large population, would have to live on an extremely low level, for *per capita* productivity would be very low.

In short, even if it were possible to adopt this solution as an escape from our present ills, it would be extremely inadvisable to do so for innumerable reasons. It is not, however, possible to adopt this solution. Nothing short of a dictatorship would be required to carry it through. Such a drastic transformation of society, involving the destruction of all vested interests, would not be otherwise possible. For such a dictatorship of the small producer there is no social basis in society.

The socialist solution, as it ought to be clear from our analysis of the process of accumulation of wealth, is to abolish private ownership of the means of production and to establish over them the ownership of the whole community.

The abolition of private and establishment of social ownership over the means of production mean the eradication of economic exploitation, the ending of economic inequalities, in other words, the removal of the basic curse of the present society. The source of accumulation of wealth in private hands is the exploitation of labour, as we saw above. With social ownership established people no longer work for others. They work for themselves, not individually but collectively; and what they produce is not for the profit of the manufacturer, but for their own consumption. Social ownership means that all wealth is held in common and shared equitably, the basis of distribution being, initially, the amount and character of work done and, finally, the needs of the individual; only that part of the produce being withheld from distribution which is necessary for defence and administration, for schools and hospitals, for economic development, and for other common purposes.

Here, then, is the basic principle of Socialism—socialization of the means of production. Any attempt at socialist reconstruction of society must start with the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production.

For a young State launching upon Socialism it may not be possible to accomplish this at one stroke. However, if it is to succeed in its purpose, it must affect this change immediately in all those spheres of large-scale production which dominate the economic life of the country and hold the key positions.

In developed communities, side by side with the means of production, rise also means of exchange and distribution—banks, commercial institutions, transport, etc. The latter issue out of and support the former. Their purpose is to keep the wheels of production turning. Socialization of the former, therefore, must also be accompanied by socialization of the latter.

We are now perhaps in a position to say what Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru would do, if he came to power.

1936

2. India and Socialism*

IT is often said that India's conditions are peculiar; that India's traditions are different; that India is industrially a backward country; and that, therefore, Socialism has no applicability here. If by this it is meant that the basic principles of Socialism have no validity in India, it would be difficult to imagine a greater fallacy.

The laws by which wealth accumulates hold as true in India as elsewhere and the manner in which the accumulation can be stopped is the same here as anywhere else. The peculiarity of Indian conditions may influence and determine the manner and the stages in which the principles of Socialism may be applied here, but never alter those principles. If social ownership of the means of production is essential for stopping exploitation and unequal distribution of wealth in other parts of the world, it is equally essential in India.

As for Indian traditions, as far as I know them, they are not averse to the sharing of life and its privileges. It is said that individualism has always been the dominant feature of Indian civilization and, therefore, the latter is opposed to Socialism. To put the problem in this manner is not to understand either of the ideals and to get lost in words. Individualism has been the prominent *motif* in our culture only in the sense that perfection of the individual has been its ideal; never in the sense of narrow, self-seeking individualism, which is the *motif* in capitalist society. And if individual perfection is the goal, the socialist has not the

* *Why Socialism?* (Ch. II), "What the Congress Socialist Party Stands for", slightly condensed.

least difficulty in showing that such perfection can come about only by aiming at the utmost common good.

Finally, India's industrial backwardness need not discourage us. If anything, this backwardness would be helpful to us because it means a much weaker opposition. As for the practicability of applying Socialism to a region of industrial backwardness, it is enough to remind the reader of what the Russians are doing in some of the most backward parts of the globe. Socialism is being built up as surely in Uzbekistan as in Moscow. If there is a socialist party in power, with the requisite sanction behind it, it can build up Socialism anywhere in the world with the help of modern science.

What, then, does the Congress Socialist Party propose? What must the *Swaraj* Government do in addition to nationalising key industries in order to realise the economic freedom of the masses; in order to rid them of exploitation, injustice, suffering, poverty, ignorance?

The measures that are necessary, in the opinion of the Party, to achieve this are clearly set forth in the *Objectives* section of the *Programme* of the All India Congress Socialist Party. Here they are :

1. Transfer of all power to the producing masses.
2. Development of the economic life of the country to be planned and controlled by the State.
3. Socialization of key and principal industries (e.g. Steel, Cotton, Jute, Railways, Shipping, Plantations, Mines), Banks, Insurance and Public Utilities, with a view to the progressive socialization of all the instruments of production, distribution and exchange.
4. State monopoly of foreign trade.
5. Organization of co-operatives for production, distribution and credit in the unsocialized sector of economic life.
6. Elimination of princes and landlords and all other classes of exploiters without compensation.
7. Redistribution of land to peasants.
8. Encouragement and promotion of co-operative and collective farming by the State.
9. Liquidation of debts owed by peasants and workers.
10. Recognition of the right to work or maintenance by the State.

- 11 "To every one according to his needs and from every one according to his capacity" to be the basis ultimately of distribution and production of economic goods.
12. Adult franchise on a functional basis.
13. No support to or discrimination between religions by the State and no recognition of any distinction based on caste or community.
14. No discrimination between the sexes by the State.
15. Repudiation of the so-called Public Debt of India.

Of the fifteen measures proposed by the Party, I shall deal only with nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11 and 12. The remaining are self-explanatory.

1. *Transfer of all power to the producing masses*

The corner-stone of the whole scheme is the transference of all power, political as well as economic, to the producing masses, i.e., to those engaged in producing goods or rendering services either by hand or by brain. If all power goes into the hands of those who work, it follows that those who do not work shall have no power.

The principle involved here is a basic one. Hitherto, in all the known forms of social organisation, sovereign power has always rested not with the labouring masses, who in every society preponderated in numbers, but with the possessing classes. Before the rise of modern democracy, this was obvious in all the political systems that preceded it. The State was openly in the hands of the ruling class; it was an instrument of class oppression. It was so even in the so-called Greek Democracies in which a small group of citizens ruled over and oppressed a much larger number of slaves who worked for them.

It was with the appearance of the ballot-box and the party system of government that the fiction of democracy came into being. These two institutions were supposed to have conferred power on the whole people, equally on the humblest and the highest. But the economic order which weighs the scales too heavily on the side of the propertied interests, makes of this democracy a mockery. The rich have their great resources, their huge election funds, their great newspapers, their schools and colleges. And the poor? Well, they can have their dole or jolly

well starve. The right to exercise the vote in these conditions means little to the workers.

And even this sham democracy, this mockery, turns against the poor workers when, in spite of all odds, they seem strong enough to disturb the scales of the economic order ever so little in their favour. The cry of revolution and "reds" goes up and what looked like democracy disappears like a mist. The ballot-box is withdrawn from the reach of the workers, party government is thrown over on to the scrap-heap. Fascism is enthroned. The scales of the economic order are more firmly adjusted in the interests of the masters.

Against such a background we inscribe the words: "All power to the masses".

We might be told that we are talking through our hats. The thing is just not possible. We firmly declare that it is. We do so, because we know the secret of power—economic domination. When those who toil become masters of the economic order, the thing is not only possible, but natural. If we were to content ourselves merely with this one item, without the proposals which follow, we would no doubt have been guilty not only of talking through our hats but also of perpetrating a fraud.

2. *Development of the economic life of the country to be planned and controlled by the State*

One of the greatest contributions of Socialism to humanity lies in the fact that it brings social progress under man's conscious control and direction. So far, with individualism and selfishness holding the centre of the stage, society has progressed blindly. A clash of purposes and interests has been the chief lever in its evolution. There has been no planning, no social purpose for which we have consciously and corporately striven. "Each for himself" is a pattern of social behaviour with which we are all so familiar.

It is in the sphere of community of purpose and corporate endeavour that Socialism holds the noblest prospects for the future of mankind; and it is collective planning of the future that so unquestionably establishes its superiority over the present disordered social "order". In releasing hidden springs of initiative and creativity, in making it possible for humanity to mould its growth, Socialism opens a new page in history—new alike from

the viewpoint of material progress as from that of moral and intellectual advance. A social will takes the place of the individual will.

What this may mean to men—to masses of men and women—may best be seen by turning to Russia, where a faith and a spirit seem to have been awakened for which neither the sky nor the sea, the wind nor river, remains unconquerable. To think that only a few years back this country was one of darkest despair and most oriental lethargy!

An essential part of any scheme of planned social progress must be a planned economy. The economic organization of a country is the key to its entire life. Therefore, control over the economic organization and its conscious direction in the interests of the commonweal are a basic requirement.

What is economic planning? For a detailed answer we must carefully study the great Russian experiment in socialist planning. Various prejudices have been implanted in the public mind with regard to it, ranging from such remarks as "it is bureaucratic and corrupt", "it has killed initiative" etc., etc., to such emphatic declarations as "it has totally failed."

It will take me too far away from my subject to consider these prejudices. It would be sufficient to observe that while every national and international effort at solving the present crisis of capitalism has abjectly failed, Russia alone has kept her head high, has made steady progress in production and in raising the standard of living. In a period of extensive unemployment, Russia alone is a country where there is a shortage of hands.

The essentials of economic planning are that production, distribution and saving (in the form of State investments) are properly adjusted and that all three march along a road carefully laid out in advance in accordance with the resources, equipments and needs of the people. The fundamental requirement is that there should be no private economic interests, separate from the social interest, between which a clash might develop.

It is incorrect to think that planning is carried out by a group of statisticians sitting in a central place and dictating to the entire economic system. Planning, in reality, is a *process* in which every unit of production, i.e., every factory and collective farm, and every unit of distribution, i.e., every cooperative and State store, take part. The men at the top co-ordinate, fit things

together, guide and direct. Indeed, Russia seems most anxious to avoid centralization of economic control. The country has already been divided into autonomous geographical units of production with administrative freedom and full creative initiative.

A common prejudice regarding planned economy is that under it every individual would be dictated to as to the articles he should wear and eat and the manner in which he should live. This, as a matter of fact, is true rather of capitalism than of planned life under Socialism. The forces, however, that determine these things for us under capitalism are the chaotic uncontrolled laws of capitalist economy. Under Socialism not only are these chaotic laws converted into purposive and determined ends, but also is the individual taken into confidence through his factory, farm or co-operative as to his views of national needs and his own requirements.

I have said above that a fundamental requirement for planning is that there should be no private interests separate from and opposable to the social or common interest. But, I may be asked, are not countries like the U.S.A., Germany and Italy made up wholly of private interests and, yet, are they not planning their economic life?

It is true that the capitalist countries are also taking the road to planning. Owing to the economic crisis that has now continued for six years, in spite of all attempts to liquidate it, it was made clear even to the capitalist class that the old, unrestricted, chaotic capitalist system had grave shortcomings which caused the breakdown of the entire capitalist machinery of production, finance and trade. Therefore, attempts were made to regulate the working of the machinery by certain breaks and gears—starting from the “codes” of Roosevelt to the industrial “corporations” of Fascism.

The general failure of all these attempts, some of which, as, for instance, the fascist attempt in Italy, have had a sufficiently long life, only emphasizes my contention that planning is possible only after private interests have been got out of the way. When Roosevelt ushered in his N.I.R.A. and A.A.A., there was an outburst of enthusiasm. That enthusiasm has touched the depths of despondency now, and the very men—the flower of the American universities—who had named Roosevelt as a saviour,



have turned into bitter cynics, if not active opponents. The last embers of hope in the N.I.R.A. have cooled down.

The failure of capitalist planning, as against the success of socialist planning, is due to the grave difference between the two. The purpose of capitalist planning is not to refashion and run the economic machine in the interest of the whole of society, but to ensure that the stream of profits should flow uninterrupted into the pockets of the capitalists. But profits which are the life-blood of capitalism are also its chief malady. As long as profits are sought, no recovery is possible. The symptoms of the disease will keep reappearing. At the same time if profits are eliminated, capitalism dies. Thus there is a vicious circle drawn from which Socialism alone offers an escape.

3. *Socialization of key and principal industries*

This is the foundation stone of the whole scheme. The State of the masses must be based on the abolition of the rule of the classes over the economic sphere. The economic freedom of the masses must mean the ending of economic exploitation engendered by private ownership of functional property. Socialist planning must start first with destroying vested interests.

The ultimate object as stated in this section is the socialization, that is, bringing under social ownership and control, of all the means of production, distribution and exchange. This means that finally all factories and workshops, all raw materials, all trading, all banking and financing will pass into the hands of the Community. There will be no private ownership at all in these spheres.

This does not mean that a man may not have personal property, i.e., property which is of only personal use to him and is not put to the creation of more property.

Thus, while the ultimate objective is the socialization of life itself, there are certain necessary measures which, the Party urges, must be enforced to start with. Not only the key industries, but also all the principal industries (Cotton and Jute while not being key industries, are certainly the principal industries of India); not only industries but banks, all transport, plantations, mines, public utilities, insurance; in fact, all the important economic institutions and activities which dominate social life, must be brought under social control.

Let us see what exactly would happen by taking one industry. Take Cotton. A decree would be issued announcing that the eighty odd mills of Bombay (let us take Bombay alone for illustration) have become the property of the Indian people. A Cotton Industries Department would be set up to run the factories in conjunction with the representatives of the workers in the industry and in accordance with the National Economic Plan. The Department would decide, in accordance with that Plan, how much cotton should be bought and what manner and quantity of cotton goods should be manufactured, in order to fulfil the needs of the Community within its existing resources.

Distribution of the manufactured goods might be rationed—that is, it may be fixed that each person is to buy only so much—if the supply is too little. Or the goods might be put on the market at fixed prices, if there is enough of them.

Rationing may seem to be an oppression to some, but only to those who have money to buy as much as they want. It would not seem harsh to those who have even less than a loin cloth to cover their body with, to those thousands of Indian families which have just one whole *sari* in common, between a number of women, so that only one of them goes out at a time, the rest keeping indoors, clad in rags and in less than rags.

What of the workers of the mills that have been socialized? The workers, from wage slaves, would become, along with the rest of the Community, the masters of the factories in which till now they slaved and sweated. Their representatives, their unions, will have a decisive hand in running the mills. Their wages will rise. Better houses will be built for them. Shorter hours of work. Schools for their children. Maternity houses. Parks, museums, libraries. The workers would be transplanted into a new world—a world of freedom, of initiative, of power, of opportunities for cultural advancement.

And what of the owners? The owners, in a society of workers, would have to become workers too. They will have opportunities to work and to serve the Community, perhaps as managers and experts—if they had the ability.

No compensation would be paid to the owners, and for very good reasons. A society which aims at social equality cannot start by creating inequalities of wealth. A society which starts with the thesis that ownership of functional property has meant

exploitation, that profits are surplus-value, cannot be expected to recognise the claims of individuals who have owned such property in respect of the socialization of that property. A system that is declared to be unjust cannot be tacitly approved of by the payment of compensation. Furthermore, the owners most probably would have enough resources laid by in the shape of personal property not to require any more. What need will they have for more wealth if they, like the others, are fully provided for, i.e., if they work? Owners in fact, with any noble instincts in them, will throw in their lot with the new dispensation and join in building the new and greater society.

All this, of course, would be different if the owners tried to be "funny". If they tried to resist the new decrees; to sabotage the new undertaking; to plot against the new society; things would indeed go wrong with them. They, in the eyes of the Law, would be the enemies of the people and would be so dealt with. Feeling against them in that case might run very high indeed—because of the revolutionary tension, the instability of the new system; the anxiety to save the newly launched ship from tempests.

What will happen to the owners, therefore, is largely dependent on how the owners will behave.

What has been said of the cotton industry would be true of the others too.

There will be planning and building up everywhere, organised production, ordered and equitable distribution.

4. *State monopoly of foreign trade*

State monopoly of foreign trade is an essential element of economic planning. In plain terms it simply means that the Community decides what it must import and export. If the question is left to private tradesmen, not the needs of the Community but private profit would determine exports and imports, in which case we may witness the strange spectacle of wheat being exported when there is famine in the land, or cotton being imported when the home producer is unable to market his produce.

Economic planning would be very difficult, almost impossible, with foreign trade in the hands of profiteers. It would be difficult in that case to control currency and prices, production and consumption and to follow successfully any plan of industrial

or agricultural development. The plan would be dislocated at every place.

Apart from these difficulties, private foreign trade would make it possible for the enemies of the Nation, either within or without, to sabotage its economic schemes and activities.

Foreign trade, in fact, affects national life so vitally that even under Capitalism it nowhere exists in an unrestricted, uncontrolled form. The historic Free Trade country—Great Britain—had also recently to renounce the system of unrestricted foreign trade.

5. *Organization of co-operatives for production, distribution and credit in the unsocialized sector of economic life*

The necessity of this measure arises from the fact that the entire economic life cannot be socialized all at once. Only the big concerns can be brought under social ownership at first. That would leave a number of small concerns and businesses still running on individualistic lines. It is to deal with this situation that this measure has been suggested. It aims at replacing this individualistic small business with co-operative concerns.

For instance, let us take the case of small consumers' shops. The State cannot, in the early stages, be expected to open stores in every little community. And yet the individualistic concerns must not be allowed to continue. While they might not do harm, they would, fundamentally, be enemies of Socialism. Therefore, it is suggested that Co-operative Consumers' Stores should be developed which should take the place of the private ones. If the private shopkeepers join the Co-operatives, well and good; otherwise they must be driven out of business by competition. A well organised Co-operative, on account of its superior resources, would always be able to beat small business, particularly when it had the State behind it.

6. *Elimination of princes, landlords and all other classes of exploiters without compensation*

If our aim is to create a society free from every kind of exploitation and social injustice, a society in which there is no rank or privilege, this measure is but in the nature of a corollary.

The princes, relics of feudal India, are anachronisms in the modern world. They are maintained and protected by

Imperialism for its own purposes ; otherwise they would long have been swept away by the modern forces of society. The princes of India are today the greatest despots in the world. Nowhere else is so much authority and power vested in such irresponsible hands. Great as is the injustice resulting from this, our plea for the abolition of the rule of the princes does not rest on it.

It is the system itself that we challenge and not its excesses. A good prince remains a prince, a good landlord remains a landlord, a good millowner is still a millowner. And as long as the social relationships inherent in these terms last, exploitation and injustice last, no matter how well-meaning the human units in those relationships are. This is a viewpoint which should be fully grasped for a correct understanding of our case. The existence of even constitutional princes in a Free India would be meaningless, an unnecessary burden, a perpetual obstacle, to the growth of democracy. The masses, society as a whole, would gain nothing by their retention and lose much.

Much the same can be said of the landlords. Landlordism was never a feature of Hindu polity. In the "Hindu" period of Indian history, the tiller of the soil paid a fixed share of his produce direct to the king or his agents. There were no middlemen. It is, indeed, an irony that when we talk of abolishing the *zamindari*, we are accused of copying Bolshevik methods and of forgetting the traditions of our great civilization!

The system of landlordism is wholly unproductive except of indolence and irresponsibility. It is a source of loss to both the State and the people. A class of middlemen, performing no social function, appropriates a share of the produce, which rightfully belongs to the cultivator. Apart from its excesses, the system in itself is an outrage on society. Land is a primary means of production and is the chief source of living in India. Its private ownership not only leads to exploitation and unequal distribution of wealth, but, in the peculiar conditions of India, also to progressive impoverishment and bankruptcy of the majority of India's population.

Where would be the sense of maintaining such a monstrous economic institution, even if its excesses of tyranny and oppression were removed? What would the masses gain by it? How would society profit by it? As for compensation, much the same

argument applies to compensating these classes as was advanced in the case of capitalists.

7. *Redistribution of land to peasants*

Common ownership being our goal, it would appear rather strange that we should think of redistributing land to peasants. This necessity arises from the fact that common ownership and cultivation of land would be slow to develop and therefore we will have to begin with peasant proprietorship.

At present there is grave inequality in the size of holdings. While some holdings are of hundreds of acres, other do not even approach an acre. We, therefore, propose to redistribute the land so as to remove these grave inequalities.

8. *State encouragement of co-operative and collective farming*

With this item we approach one of the most difficult and baffling problems that would face any socialist government, much more so the Indian socialist government. Let us carefully consider the matter.

India is a predominantly agricultural country. It is argued, therefore, that it can have little to do with Socialism. We have already shown above that under present world conditions and with the productive resources of society developed as they are today, it is possible to build up Socialism anywhere, no matter how backward the place may be. If there is a party in power in India desirous of establishing Socialism in the country, the fact of its being predominantly agricultural will not be an impediment. It will lower the pace of socialist reconstruction, but nothing beyond that.

The real question is not the possibility of establishing Socialism, but whether Indian agriculture, the Indian peasant, the Indian nation will gain by Socialism. And to this question our answer is emphatic. There is not the least doubt in our mind that Socialism alone can save Indian agriculture from ruin and bankruptcy; can alone make the peasant prosperous and progressive; can alone make the nation strong and powerful.

The malady of Indian agriculture has gone so far that nothing but a drastic transformation can save it. Briefly, it suffers from the following diseases: vested interests in land which not only exploit the actual tiller of the soil, but also make him an indifferent and

inefficient cultivator; disproportionately high taxation; an unbearable burden of debt that is fast approaching the breaking point; sub-division of land into utterly uneconomic holdings; low productivity; unsatisfactory methods of marketing; bad credit facilities; lack of balance between industry and agriculture, town and village. Any of these is a big enough problem to be tackled, but when all of them have to be faced, as they must be, in order to realise a synthetic and comprehensive solution, no possible measure of reform can cope with the situation.

The only solution is to clear away all the vested interests that lead in any manner whatever to the exploitation of the tiller of the soil; liquidate all agrarian debts; pool the holdings and establish co-operative and collective farming, State and co-operative credit and marketing systems and co-operative subsidiary industries. It should not be supposed that these are "destructive" ideas. They will mean the destruction of nothing but that system of exploitation which is inherent in the relationship between tenant and landlord. For the rest, they are wholly constructive, requiring nothing except State guidance, encouragement and propaganda.

Those who get frightened at the mere idea of co-operative and collective enterprise, particularly when applied to the field of agriculture, might suggest that a better alternative would be to create solvent and efficient peasant proprietors, each with an indivisible economic holding, and cultivating his land independently. Our answer is that, if this is actually done, it too will involve changes no less drastic than those required by us, and at the same time the result will be infinitely inferior— from the point of view of both the peasant and the nation. From the peasant's point of view, because an independent peasant runs greater risks and is at a greater disadvantage as producer, seller, buyer and borrower than the peasant who is a member of a co-operative farm. At the same time, he gets none of the facilities and amenities that a large co-operative enterprise must offer its members. Culturally and ethically he is bound to be a much less developed individual, speaking in terms of averages, than one who has shed his narrow individualism and identified himself with the Community. Considered from the nation's point of view, our case is stronger still. And it should be remembered that the peasant too is a part—the greater part in India—of the nation.

While speaking of the necessity of Socialism in India, I pointed out above that we required Socialism here, as elsewhere, not only to free the people from exploitation, but also to enable ourselves to plan and carry out a conscious development of the country's economic and social life. A planned development would be a much greater necessity in India than elsewhere, because life here has been so completely disorganised as a result of imperialistic exploitation.

But with individualistic agriculture, no planning would be possible. Consider the prospect of planning production and distribution in a country where the raw materials and the food-stuffs are all grown on little individual holdings. Is the thing possible? What crops must be raised and how much of each are questions which the Community must decide if it wants to decide what manufactured goods it must have; what factories it must build; what food it must consume; what materials it must export in order to import the goods it needs.

This is not possible unless agriculture is organised in larger units than an individual holding. With each village becoming a unit for agricultural production and with each unit working in unison with the others, working as a part of an organised economy, this could be made possible. Of course, the State, by preferential taxation, may stimulate or curtail the production of given crops even under individualistic agriculture, and thus establish some control over agricultural production, as they did in the early days in Russia. But this would not take the State very far on the road to planning.

Then, again, consider long-time planning. Say, it is desired within a period of years to double the agricultural production of India. Could this be done if agriculture continued to be on an individualistic basis? Of course, one could educate the farmer in improved methods of cultivation and so on; but that alone would not be sufficient. There are limits to agricultural production when the land is subdivided into little plots individually cultivated.

Take again the problem of establishing a balance between agriculture and industry. There can be no solution of the agricultural problem, unless this balance has been established. But this, again, requires co-operative effort and planning, and here again individualistic farming would prove a stumbling-block.

If we look at the problem from the point of view of psychology, we shall find that Socialism in agriculture, i.e., co-operative and collective farming, is essential for the success of any attempt to recast Indian life on a socialist basis. I have often been asked : why can we not organise our industry on a socialist basis and leave agriculture on the present individualistic one ? Our answer is that the existence of the two standards—individualism on the one hand and Socialism on the other—would create such mal-adjustments and friction that the whole hybrid system would be paralyzed. Socialism can never go with millions of peasants, owning their own patches of land and cultivating them for their own profit. In the same Community, a part, the smaller part in India and most other countries, cannot live and work in a corporate manner, while the remaining, and larger part, remains wedded to individualism—with all its waste, a product of social friction and frustration. If Socialism has to be built up in the country, corporate life and standards must also grow up in the village along with their growth in the cities.

Thus, look at the problem from whichever side you please, the application of socialist principles to Indian agriculture is inescapable. What exactly, then, is socialist agriculture, what is co-operative and collective farming ?

We all know something about the old Indian village commune. It is true that this was neither the most ancient nor the most common form of agricultural organisation known in India. It finds no mention in the *Manusmriti*. However, it is indisputable that there were long periods of Indian history and long tracts of Indian territory in which a form of village existed—whatever its origin—in which common tenure of land and sometimes also common tillage were recognised and practised. In Madras such villages existed till the other day. The socialist aim follows in spirit the lines of the old system—except that the socialist village, instead of being a closed circle, a closed economic unit, would be an actively co-operating unit in a larger economic system.

In Russia, where alone in our day Socialism is being built up and where alone a serious attempt has been made, with remarkable success, to socialize agriculture—an agriculture, mind you, no less primitive, no less hide-bound by tradition and dominated no less by an ignorant, indolent, narrowly-selfish peasantry—two types of socialised agriculture, rather three, have grown up.

The first form, a lower one when considered from socialist standards, that we witness is simply co-operative farming. Under this system, individual holdings remain (though much equalized by the redistribution of the land of the landlords and the capitalist farmers); the old agricultural instruments, horses, etc., remain individual property; but for the purposes of cultivation, the holdings are pooled together and the crop is raised and harvested with joint labour. The produce is distributed according to the size of the holding and the amount of labour put in, after costs have been accounted for. This is the first lesson in social living. It promotes a community of spirit and by materially increasing the output, it becomes an incentive to the individualistic peasant to take more kindly to community of life and work.

The next step from this is the collective farm. Here no individual holdings remain and the basis of distribution is only the amount of labour put in and, in some unusual cases, individual needs. But even in the collective village individual ownership of tools may yet remain, and pigs and cattle and horses may yet be the property of individuals. While an immense growth in communal living has taken place, much of life is lived apart.

So we see as the third stage, the "communes" rise, where there is the utmost possible common living.

This is the achievement of Socialism in Russia. What about India? Is there anything in this system of socialistic agriculture that is impracticable here? If the Russians have achieved the impossible, why cannot we too do it? There is no reason to suppose that the Indian peasant is any more averse to common endeavour and the sharing of life than the Russian.

Let us be slow instead of hasty as the Russians. Let us use no coercion. Nor does the Party advocate forcible socialization of agriculture, as it does of industry. *Encouragement and promotion* of co-operative and collective farming is the phrase used—encouragement and promotion through education, propaganda, demonstration, subsidy, preferential taxation.

We might use fewer labour-saving agricultural machinery in view of our population and the shortage of land as compared with the virgin expanses of Russia's territory. This does not mean that we shall retain the present inefficient plough, but perhaps we may not require, at least till industrial development

absorbs the surplus rural population, many tractors and mechanical reapers and binders. We shall electrify the village and give it radio and easy transport, yes. But we might be slow in mechanizing agriculture. We are criticised as being mere imitators of the West. But we are not out to imitate. We only wish to learn.

Let us make fewer mistakes than the Russians, if we are wise enough to avoid them. Remember, it is easy to be wise after the event. The Russians were themselves the first to realize their mistakes; and they never set out deliberately to make them. When with test-tubes mistakes cannot be avoided, much less can they be avoided when you are experimenting with millions of men and one-sixth of the globe's surface.

Let not the Russians' mistakes blind us to their great achievements, to the lessons they are teaching. Let wise parlour philosophers grin over them and shake their sceptic little heads. For us, who have to do things, who have a task before us, it is the great principle of a new life which the Russians are so boldly practising that alone is of value.

There is a certain type of confused and often interested person who goes about the country saying that the socialists will take away the land from the peasants. We socialists do not have an island across the seas where we shall transport all the land that we shall "confiscate" from the peasants. The lands will be where they are and the peasants will have them and cultivate them. The question only is *how* the peasants shall cultivate their land so that society may benefit most—the peasants themselves more than anyone else.

The only plea that we put forth is that social good rather than the good of a small number of individuals should be our goal. And I think I have been able to show that if the land is tilled in common—better still, if it is owned in common too—a great boon would be conferred on India's entire rural population. The village would be transformed from its present mean position to one of prosperity and culture, unknown in any age of Indian history.

Before leaving this topic, I wish to take up a problem which is closely allied to it. Among Congressmen there is a large section which is devoutly attached to the village and all it stands for. This section, owing to a misunderstanding, feels called upon to take the offensive against the socialists who, it is known, stand

for machinery and therefore, so it is thought, for the exploitation of the village, for the disruption of its beautiful self-sufficient economy (which is non-existent now) and for the growth of parasitic cities.

Let me first of all freely admit all that these friends have to say against the modern cities. These monsters of human habitation—their crowding, their nerve-racking traffic, their insanitation, their ugliness, their slums—rightly make us revolt against them and compel us to look upon them as a menace, as a danger, as enemies of good and sensible living. The city for most of its dwellers is a terrible place of habitation. It has its theatres and resorts of amusement; but these are more like anodynes for tired nerves and fatigued bodies than things of joy and beauty, from which the soul may draw sustenance, or, if you prefer a modern phrase, which may develop and recreate man's personality.

Further, the modern cities have grown on the exploitation of the people—not, however, of the village people alone, but also of the city workers. The conditions of this exploitation bring about an unnatural hostility between city and village, in which the latter invariably gets the worse deal. While art, knowledge, luxury, comfort, are concentrated in the cities, the villages remain neglected, undeveloped—terrible contrasts to the cities which they help to create.

While all this is true, it is wrong to imagine that under Socialism this abnormal growth of the social body would be retained or encouraged. Socialism, if anything, is a technique of social engineering which has as its aim the harmonious and well-balanced growth of the whole of society. Neither the socialist village, nor the socialist city, will bear any resemblance to its present prototype. The contrasts, the inner conflicts, would not only not be perpetuated but systematically fought and eradicated.

It is true that the socialist hugs machinery. But to him machinery is not an instrument of exploitation, not stakes and stocks to which to tie the human body and torture it. Machines to us mean friends of labour—things that relieve human toil, increase its productivity, conquer the wind and the sea for us.

The assumption that machinery will inevitably create monstrosities of cities and rural unemployment by disrupting village economy, is wrong. Machines if used for private benefit by a

handful of people who own them, will undoubtedly produce these and worse results. But that society as a whole making use of these efficient and powerful instruments of production for the good of the entire population, will also encounter these same results is too absurd a proposition to be accepted.

Under Socialism the cities will be planned and concentration avoided, because industry will be diffused. There will be geographical planning as well as statistical. On the other hand the villages will be transformed from little clusters of houses—cut off from the world, tucked away into the recesses of the earth—to progressive communities, connected with the rest of the world with electricity, railways, telephones, radios, roads, buses. The village too will become an industrial unit of production like the city. It will have its self-government, its schools, its recreation centre, its museum.

10. *Recognition of the right to work or maintenance by the State*

In the capitalist State or in the ones preceding it, there was no security of work and therefore of life. As long as virgin land existed, no security for able-bodied persons was needed. But when land became scarce and could not be secured—nor could employment be found—one had either to starve or rob and plunder. If one did the latter and was caught, one was brought to justice; but if one starved to death—well, God blessed his soul.

This insecurity of employment has become a greater scourge in our days than it ever was. Industrialism has created a property-less class of workers, who can live only by selling their labour. At the same time, no provision has been made to find employment for them. Each is expected to shift for himself. It was only after industrial crises made a scandal of unemployment, and labour became too militant, that the modern States made provision for unemployment insurance.

In India, the paralysis of both industry and agriculture under Imperialism has resulted in the acutest imaginable form of unemployment.

Under Socialism, this state of affairs would be intolerable. In fact no just and sensible social order can look with equanimity upon the starvation of millions of its members. Provision for employment or maintenance for every adult member, is the least

that can be expected from any reasonable organization of society. This would be one of the first concerns of a Socialist Government in India, and one of the first guarantees it must give the people.

II. *To every one according to his needs and from every one according to his capacity*

This is the ultimate ideal of Socialism. It means simply this, that when Socialism is fully developed everyone would put forth his best effort in the service of the Community—in working for it in factories, farms, schools, laboratories, theatres—and would take whatever he needed from the things that were available. Of course if he made, say, bolts and nuts, it is not suggested that he would take as many of them as he wanted. He would have no use for bolts and nuts and there would be no private market in which he could sell them. What he would take according to his needs would be consumption goods—clothes, food, books. There would be no money, no wages, no distinction in incomes.

Let us keep in mind that such would be the ultimate state of society. It presupposes a condition of plenty—that enough of everything of use is available for everyone. Till this condition is reached some restriction on consumption would be necessary, either by the direct method of rationing or the indirect method of wages.

Doubts will be raised about the practicability of the principle stated here, even in the case of plenty. The problem is one of social psychology and common-sense and should not be at all difficult in practice. Let us first remember that a new type of human character would have been created, that selfishness would be looked down upon as a crime and vice rolled in one. In Soviet Russia grain-stealers from collective farms are liable to be shot; such is the sanctity of social property.

Against the background of this new psychological outlook, let us consider the practicability of the principle. The suggestion is made that if people were free to take as much as they pleased, they would take advantage of such freedom. But let us consider the nature of the society they would be living in. There would be full security of life and work: provision for old age, sickness, child-birth, etc. The individual would have nothing to worry about except making himself a good man and doing his job

well. Things would not be bought or sold in that Community; they would merely be manufactured and distributed. Smuggling of goods across the frontier would be well-nigh impossible, except of jewellery and such other trinkets: that much of jewellery or trinkets would be available in a socialist society is doubtful! In a society like this, what motive could the individual have to hoard things? He could get what he needed, whenever he wanted. They would be *his* things, they would not disappear the next day. Social standards and a sense of complete security would eliminate the hoarding instinct.

Till such a development of society has taken place, there would be restriction of consumption, as I have said above. There would be money and wages and some difference in incomes. Wages are a system of apportioning consuming power. If production increases, wages would rise proportionately to socialist saving, i.e., investment in production of goods and expenditure on the provision of social amenities. Differences in wages would continue within much narrower limits than at present—only as a concession to our present moral standards and the great differences in skill that exist today.

12. *Adult franchise on a functional basis*

This means that representation instead of being on a territorial basis would be on the basis of occupations. Representatives are supposed to represent interests; but interests within a given country are not distributed territorially but functionally, occupationally. Therefore functional representation means truer representation.

This item, it may be added, is meant to meet only the problems of the transition period. In time, occupations, though still diversified, would acquire a unity and solidarity, a community of interest and purpose, which would make such discriminatory representation meaningless. In fact the State itself in its modern sense would wither away with the full development of Socialism and a classless society. Representation in that stage would not be to political assemblies of the State but to Boards of industry, education, and so on. Representative Government would be entirely revolutionized.

These are the measures which we propose. They are far-reaching measures requiring courage, ability, faith: virtues surely not wanting in the new youth of India.

If we dream of creating a great India, it is only these measures that can enable us to realise our dream. If we want to wipe off poverty, injustice, filth, indolence, ignorance from the face of this great country, we can do so only by adopting these bold measures.

If we are told that we are asking for the Moon, I shall firmly reply that we are doing nothing of the sort. If complete independence is not as far as the Moon, *these* measures are certainly not that far.

It is said that Socialism is not applicable to India. Which of these measures, I ask, is inapplicable to our country, if the will to apply them be present? If Indian capitalism is weak, that, instead of being a hindrance to us in our task of building up Socialism, should only facilitate it. The backwardness of India did not prevent the British from building railroads, telegraphs, banks, mills, warehouses. These instead of being a boon, as in themselves they ought to be, turned out to be a scourge simply because they were not built for our good. The backwardness of Turkestan has not prevented the Russians from building up Socialism there.

As I have said repeatedly, if we mean to do it, under modern world conditions, with science and its inventions, it is possible to build up Socialism anywhere.

Shall we have the power to do so in India?

If we acquire sufficient power, as we hope to, to achieve complete independence, we shall have power to do almost anything in this country. There is no power or party in India stronger than imperialism, and if we humble the latter there will be no one to challenge our will. The princes and the landlords, who may seem rather formidable today, propped up by British force, would wither away at our first touch. The capitalists, perhaps a little stronger, would also be powerless to check us.

1940

3. An Outline Picture of Swaraj*

THE Congress and the country are on the eve of a great national upheaval. The final battle for freedom is soon to be fought. This will happen when the whole world is being shaken by mighty forces of change. Out of the catastrophe of the European War, thoughtful minds everywhere are anxious to create a new world—a world based on the co-operative goodwill of nations and men. At such a time the Congress considers it necessary to state definitely the ideals of freedom for which it stands and for which it is soon to invite the Indian people to undergo the uttermost sufferings.

The free Indian nation shall work for peace between nations and total rejection of armaments and for the method of peaceful settlement of national disputes through some international authority freely established. It will endeavour particularly to live on the friendliest terms with its neighbours, whether they be great powers or small nations, and shall covet no foreign territory.

The law of the land will be based on the will of the people freely expressed by them. The ultimate basis of maintenance of order shall be the sanction and concurrence of the people.

The free Indian State shall guarantee full individual and civil liberty and cultural and religious freedom, provided that there

* Draft of a resolution sent to Mahatma Gandhi for consideration by the Ramgarh Session of the Indian National Congress held in March 1940. Though not discussed there in view of the decision to pass only one resolution, that dealing with the immediate political situation, it was liked by Mahatma Gandhi, who published it in the *Harijan*—with his own comments, agreeing with most of the suggestions made here.

shall be no freedom to overthrow by violence the constitution framed by the Indian people through a Constituent Assembly.

The State shall not discriminate in any manner between citizens of the nation. Every citizen shall be guaranteed equal rights. All distinctions of birth and privilege shall be abolished. There shall be no titles emanating either from inherited social status or the State.

The political and economic organisation of the State shall be based on principles of social justice and economic freedom. While this organisation shall conduce to the satisfaction of the national requirements of every member of society, material satisfaction shall not be its sole objective. It shall aim at healthy living and the moral and intellectual development of the individual. To this end and to secure social justice, the State shall endeavour to promote small-scale production carried on by individual or co-operative effort for the equal benefit of all concerned. All large-scale collective production shall be eventually brought under collective ownership and control, and in this behalf the State shall begin by nationalising heavy transport, shipping, mining and the heavy industries. The textile industry shall be progressively decentralised.

The life of the villages shall be reorganised and the villages shall be made self-governing units, self-sufficient in as large a measure as possible. The land laws of the country shall be drastically reformed on the principle that land shall belong to the actual cultivator alone, and that no cultivator shall have more land than is necessary to support his family on a fair standard of living. This will end the various systems of landlordism on the one hand and farm bondage on the other.

The State shall protect the interests of all the classes, but when any of these impinges upon the interests of those who have been poor and downtrodden, it shall defend the latter and thus restore the balance of social justice.

In all State-owned and State-managed enterprises, the workers shall be represented in the management through their elected representatives and shall have an equal share in it with the representatives of the Government.

In the Indian States, there shall be complete democratic government established and in accordance with the principles of abolition of social distinctions and equality between citizens, there shall

not be any titular heads of the States in the persons of Rajas and Nawabs.

This is the order which the Congress envisages and which it shall work to establish. The Congress firmly believes that this order shall bring happiness, prosperity and freedom to the people of all races and religions in India who together shall build on these foundations a great and glorious nation.

1946

4. My Picture of Socialism*

NO intelligent person today will doubt that the next stage in the evolution of human society is socialism. But will there be a like agreement on the question, what is socialism? Different theories of socialism and different pictures of a socialist society have been presented from time to time by socialist thinkers and workers. These differences are reduced somewhat when one takes into consideration only one of the several broad schools of the socialist thought. Thus, if we accept Marxism, or belong to the Marxist School, as I do, the differences are greatly narrowed down, but they are by no means removed or obliterated. There are socialist movements in the world today professing allegiance to Marx that widely differ among themselves, even quarrel and fight with one another. The Stalinists and Trotskyists, for instance, both profess to march under the banner of Marxism, but they not only differ from each other, but even thirst for each other's blood. Which of these two "Marxist" schools presents a true picture of socialism? Those who belong to neither of these warring camps would doubtless say, none.

In our own country the Communists and Royists¹ both swear by Marx, but we have seen the kind of "socialist" policy they have followed in the name of Marx. We have seen that to them Marxism included even working as hirelings of Maxwell² and spying over Indian revolutionaries. Moreover, both these "Marxist" groups are each other's bitter enemies. There are

* Article in *Janata*.

¹ Followers of M. N. Roy.

² Home Member of the Government of India during the '42 struggle.

other little groups too in this country flying Marxist colours, but never agreeing among themselves as to what is Marxism.

It seems to me, therefore, that in view of all this confusion and rival claims, the socialist movement in India must evolve its own picture of socialism in the light of Marxist thought, of world history since Marx's death and of conditions in this country and our historical background. Marxism is a science of society and a scientific method of social change that includes social revolution. As such there can be no room for dogmatism or fundamentalism in Marxist thought. Those who on the one hand call Marxism scientific and on the other introduce dogmatism into it do it great disservice. In science there is no such thing as final truth. Science progresses by the progressive elimination of untruth from human knowledge. If Marxism is a science, Marx could not have expounded ultimate truths, but only made approximations to them. Today with a vastly developed store of human knowledge and vastly greater experience and observation of capitalist society, we are in a position to make far nearer approximations to the truth than Marx. The unending merit of Marx is that he has given us a method to understand and change history, even as Darwin gave us a method of understanding life. Darwinism and Marxism were born almost together, but not even the most ardent Darwinist today believes in the theories of evolution as they were propounded by Darwin. Yet he would proudly call himself a Darwinist. My professor of Biology at Wisconsin ranked the *Origin of the Species* only next to the Bible amongst the world's books, but he never thought for a moment that he was being disloyal to his master when he proceeded to show where modern research had proved Darwin false or only partially true. It is open in the same manner for a Marxist to give not the second but even the first rank to *Capital* and yet seek to develop and refine the partial truths of Marxism.

II

With these introductory remarks let me turn now to the subject in hand. The creation of a socialist society involves two stages: the stage of the transition, and the stage when socialism has been established. It is obvious that the form of the transitional period will be determined by present conditions and final objectives, that is, the final picture of socialism in view.

I shall consider here only the final picture of socialism.

The objectives of socialism are: elimination of exploitation and poverty; provision of equal opportunities to all for self-development; full development of the material and moral resources of society and utilization of these resources in accordance with the needs and wishes of society as a whole rather than in accordance with the dictates of profit; equitable apportionment of national wealth and social, educational and other services between all who labour and serve society.

A system of social organisation that serves these ends is a socialist society. Anything that does not, is not socialism. No preconceived theories, no matter by whom propounded, need detain or confuse us if they do not subserve these ends in practice.

I believe that these ends can be achieved only if certain vital changes are made in the existing society and the economic and political organisation of the future society is based on the foundations described below.

First of all, there must be complete political freedom. In other words, India must become an independent nation. There can be no socialism under British rule. This point needs no emphasis.

Second, there should be no privileged economic or political class as at present, i.e., a self-perpetuating class wielding economic and political power. In other words, the "ruling" Princes and the zamindars (not the peasant farmers of the Punjab, but the landholders of U.P., Bihar and some other provinces) and the capitalists must be made to surrender their economic and political power and privilege.

After the removal of the British power, the abolition of Princes and of the *zamindari* and capitalist systems should be a comparatively simpler problem. If the Indian people proved strong enough to destroy the British Raj in India, nothing could stop them from destroying feudalism and capitalism if they desired to do so. The only limiting factor would be the stage of development of the political consciousness of the masses. In other words, if the socialist movement were to become strong enough to move the masses in the right direction, all these changes could be made without much difficulty or opposition.

Abolition of Princedom hardly raises any technical problem for socialism to solve. Bourgeois society has the solution ready

at hand, and we could draw upon the history of bourgeois revolutions. The Princes will only have to be removed from their *gadis* and reduced to the status of the ordinary citizen and their States made part of regions scientifically determined with due regard to geography, economic resources and cultural affinities.

Abolition of the *zamindari* system is also only the first step in a socialist reorganization of our agrarian economy which indeed involves rather difficult questions of theory and practice. By merely saying that there will be no zamindars in socialist India, we say practically nothing as to the real form of socialist agriculture we wish to develop in this country. I shall describe below the main outlines of our socialised agricultural economy as I visualize it.

Abolition of capitalism is undoubtedly a great step forward towards socialism, but by itself it can hardly be called socialism. It is merely a negative half of which the positive half has yet to be created. In what manner capitalism will be abolished and what will take its place will determine to a large extent the kind of socialism that we are going to have. I shall try to give below the picture I have in mind of socialist industry in this country.

To a consideration of agriculture and industry I shall have to add a few words about banking and trade. That would give us a fair picture of socialist economy. The political half of my picture of socialist India would then remain to be drawn up. I shall first deal with the economic part of my picture.

III

Let me take up agriculture first.

The land systems in this country are complicated beyond description, but they all agree more or less in exploiting the tiller of the soil in the interest of a small landed and moneyed class. All these systems have to be scrapped completely and a new system created in their place. In building up socialist agriculture, we will have to pass through two stages—the co-operative and collective stages.

After the abolition of *zamindari*, there will be a redistribution of land with a view to breaking up big holdings and making the smaller holdings economic. No peasant would have more than a certain maximum acreage of land, let us say, thirty acres, and

none less than five. No one shall be allowed to own land who does not reside in the village and actually till his land. The unit of agricultural economy would be the village. The legal ownership of land would rest with the village, as a whole, and the village panchayat would have the power, according to laws made by the State, to settle its lands with individual peasants. Thus the peasant will have a sort of proprietary right over the land settled with them. Present proprietary rights will be respected except where found necessary to alter them in order to bring about a fairer redistribution of land and remove gross inequalities at both ends. The proprietary right would be restricted merely to the right of the peasant to receive from the produce of the village lands his share in accordance with the size of his holding. No peasant will be allowed to sell land to anyone except to the *gram panchayat*. Peasants will not be allowed to carry on cultivation and other farming operations separately. Each *gram panchayat*, among other things, will also function as a farmers' co-operative. The co-operative will conduct all farming operations including buying, selling and borrowing. All who labour in the fields will receive wages in kind or money according to the wage laws of the State and the produce will be distributed after deducting costs according to the size of holdings.

This is the co-operative stage of socialist farming. The next stage is the collective stage in which no individual proprietary rights in agricultural lands (in Russia each collective farmer is allowed to own privately up to three acres of land around his homestead for kitchen gardening, raising poultry or other similar purposes) are recognised and all lands pertaining to a village, or farming unit, are owned and run by village collectives. In Russia collectivisation was pushed through at great human cost and under a ruthless dictatorship. Estimates run up to as high a figure as twenty millions of those who had to be "liquidated" in order to make collectivisation a success. I do not favour such a colossal repression of the toiling peasant masses, nor does socialist theory permit it. Abolition of landlordism, redistribution of land and breaking up of big holdings would require State coercion to be used against fifteen to twenty per cent of the agricultural population perhaps. But collectivisation might require sixty to seventy per cent of that population to be repressed. I do not find any justification for any political party,

speaking and acting in the name of the toiling masses, to indulge in such wholesale repression. Twenty per cent may be coerced in the interest of the remaining eighty per cent, but there is no justification for repressing seventy per cent of the peasants even "for their own good". Co-operative farming itself would require a good measure of coercion. But in that case a wise mixture of coercion and persuasion, as also concession of certain economic advantages, might be, and I am sure will be, found to be sufficient. Collectivisation on the other hand would require a degree of wholesale repression that is repugnant to socialism, which above all is the expression of the will of the toiling masses. Therefore, collectivisation will follow as the second stage and its pace would be necessarily slower and adjusted to the results of propaganda and demonstration. I need not, however, emphasise that new agricultural colonies and settlements need not pass from the co-operative to the collective stage. They can and will be put on a collective basis from the start.

Conversion of peasant agricultural economy into the sort of co-operative economy described above would result in a considerable part of the present agricultural population being thrown out of employment. Place will have to be found for this surplus agrarian population in industry, particularly in industries subsidiary to farming.

We turn now to a consideration of socialist industry. I visualize two types of industries in a socialist India, large scale and small scale. It goes without saying that both large and small industries together with agriculture will form parts of a balanced national economy, democratically managed and controlled.

All large industries would be owned and managed by the Federal or Provincial Governments. Representatives of trade unions would have appropriate voice in the management from the lowest to the highest levels.

I visualize all small industries to be organized into Producers' Co-operatives, who would own and manage their industries. Apart from passing legislation for the regulation of these co-operatives, the State will not interfere with their work. These industries will include subsidiary agricultural industries as well as existing and new handicrafts.

I visualize and advocate another type of industrial ownership apart from State ownership and Producers' Co-operatives,

that is, municipal or community ownership. A township or a city may own and manage, if not large, middling and small industries. The representatives of the workers in these community owned industries would naturally have adequate voice in their management.

I advocate development of these co-operatives and community owned industries, firstly, because I do not believe it is possible to find employment for many years to come for our surplus population, which would swell further at least by twenty per cent by the revolution in agriculture, in large industry alone; secondly, because I desire to prevent the State from acquiring the sole monopoly in industry and employment. The State under socialism threatens, as in Russia, far from withering away, to become an all-powerful tyrant maintaining a stranglehold over the entire body of citizens. This leads to totalitarianism of the type we witness in Russia today. By dispersing the ownership and management of industry and by developing the villages into democratic village republics, we break this stranglehold to a very large extent and attenuate the danger of totalitarianism.

In the field of trade I have the following picture in mind. Foreign trade will be entirely in the hands of the State. Internal trade will be shared between the State, the local community and the co-operatives. All banking will be in the hands of the State.

Here then is the economic picture of my Socialist India: co-operative farming run by *gram panchayats*; collective farms in new settlements; large-scale industry owned and managed by the State; community owned and managed industry; and small industry organised into producers' co-operatives.

IV

I come now to the political part of my picture.

The State in socialist India must be a fully democratic State. There can be no socialism without democracy. It is a common mistake these days to think that there must be the dictatorship of the proletariat in a socialist State. This is against the teaching of Marx. The dictatorship of the proletariat has a place only in the transitional period from capitalism to socialism. And in this period too it is not inevitable in every case. Marx visualised a capitalist State, such as England, where political democracy was

in full vogue and there was no large standing army, where democratic processes could be used to bring about socialism. But apart from such rare cases, dictatorship of the proletariat has been considered in Marxian thought as essential for the transitional period. It is, however, the very essence of Marxism that once the transition is over, the State must become a fully democratic institution. When the old ruling classes have been destroyed and society has been converted entirely into a society of workers, it is idiotic to talk of a dictatorship of the proletariat because the proletariat cannot dictate over itself.

Let me stop here to say a word further about the dictatorship of the proletariat. Whether our transition in India from present society to socialism takes the democratic or dictatorial form—I personally think it would take the democratic form—it should be remembered that dictatorship of the proletariat in Marxist theory does not mean the dictatorship of a single party, such as the Communist Party in Russia. It means the dictatorship of a class, the working class; or in industrially backward countries such as India and post-Czarist Russia, of a combination of the toiling classes, such as workers, peasants and the lower middle class. These classes may have one or more political parties and these parties must all be united in the dictatorship or have freedom to function freely under the dictatorship. The dictatorship of the proletariat never meant that parties of the working class or other toilers would be suppressed; it meant only the suppression of the ruling classes and their political and economic institutions.

Coming back to the question of democracy under socialism, it is necessary to explain in some detail what this democracy should mean concretely. First of all, it should mean that there might be more than one political party of the working people, and that the workers, the industrial and peasant co-operatives, the trade unions, etc. might form different political parties and that these parties should function freely. It should mean that there should be full freedom for expression of opinion and to form voluntary organizations for political purposes. The trade unions, the local communities, the co-operatives and other such corporate bodies of the working people might have their own newspapers and broadcasting systems, conduct their own publicity and propaganda and even run their own schools and educational institutions.

Democracy under socialism should further mean that the trade unions should not be limbs of the State and subservient to it, but independent bodies supporting the State, and also exercising a check over the government of the day. In Russia the trade unions have no independence whatever and have been subjected to the will of the State on the theory that the State being a workers' state, all workers' organisations must be subject to it. Here the State and government have been confused. A particular State may be a workers' State, but the government of the day might be making mistakes and wilfully or unwilfully acting contrary to the workers' interests. In that case there must be independent organs of the working class, such as trade unions—and in a socialist society the trade unions will be second in importance only to the government itself—in a position to check or correct or change the government in power.

V

Thus my picture of a socialist India is the picture of an economic and political democracy. In this democracy man will neither be slave to capitalism nor to a party or the State. Man will be free. He will have to serve society which will provide him with employment and the means of livelihood, but within limits he will be free to choose his avocation and station in life. He will be free to express his opinions and there will be opportunities for him to rise to his full moral stature. There will be no great difference between man and man—except the difference of physical and mental endowments—for there will be no great difference in incomes.

1947

5. The Transition to Socialism*

A socialist India, it should be clear, cannot spring up overnight from the womb of history. A period of gestation, a transitional period from the India of today to the future must intervene. This period may be long or short depending upon internal and external circumstances and the wisdom or unwisdom of socialist policies. But a period of transition there must be.

In my last article¹ I had written : " It is obvious that the form of the transitional period will be determined by present conditions and final objectives, that is, the final picture of socialism in view." That picture is now before us. It was necessary to depict that picture first, because we can choose our path only when we know where we are going. Well, the goal is before us : so is the starting point, i.e., the present situation in the country. Which is the path that leads from here to that final goal ? Have we a choice ; are there many paths from which we may choose ? I believe there is only one correct path ; any other will lead us not to the objectives we already have in view, but to other goals. Therefore, we must be extremely careful in choosing our way to Socialism.

Perhaps, we may enquire first what help we get from Marx in making the choice. At the Hague Convention of the First International in 1872, Marx, speaking on tactics, made the following remarks : " The worker must one day capture political power in order to found the 'new organisation of labour . . . But we do not assert that the way to reach this goal is the same

* Article in *Janata* (written more than six months before the advent of Indian Independence). Slightly condensed.

¹ " My Picture of Socialism."

everywhere. We know that the institutions, the manners and the customs of the various countries must be considered, and we do not deny that there are countries like England and America, and, if I understood your arrangements better, I might even add Holland, where the worker may attain his object by peaceful means. But not in all countries is this the case." Marx here plainly conceives of two ways to socialism, one peaceful, the other violent. Which of the two ways must be adopted depends on the conditions in each country. In Russia there was no democracy, so Lenin took the path of violent revolution though it may be doubtful today how far was Lenin justified in disbanding the Constituent Assembly when he had no majority in it. There is democracy in England, and its scope has developed greatly since Marx's days. Accordingly, we find British Labour installed in Government by a democratic process and putting socialist schemes into practice in a democratic fashion. Not even the blindest fanatic would dream of the possibility or necessity of a violent revolution in Great Britain today.

In India there is no democracy, and Indian society is far from being democratic. There is no democracy because there is British rule, which exists not by the force of democratic sanctions, but by virtue of its armed might. Indian society, with its princes and *nawabs*, its landlords, its higher and lower castes and its untouchables is wholly undemocratic both in spirit and fact.

For the past many years India has been struggling to achieve a free democracy. As everyone knows the Indian National Congress has been the instrument of this struggle. Its efforts have brought the country very near to success, but a great deal of further effort has yet to be made. Our path to socialism will very largely be determined by the outcome of these efforts. It is not yet clear what the outcome is going to be. In any case, we are not spectators in this process, but active participants exerting our utmost to shape and influence that outcome.

The problem of the transition to socialism has two parts at the present juncture. The first part is concerned with the achievement of a free Indian democracy and the second with the transformation of that democracy into a socialist democracy.

Let me deal with the second part first. Let us assume that a full democratic State has been established in India. In such a democracy, if we go by historical parallels and the prognostications

of Marx and Lenin, the bourgeois class would come at the top. How could the working class and the city and rural poor displace the bourgeoisie and establish socialism? Through the democratic process or a violent revolution?

Speaking for myself, I would choose the democratic method. Remember the goal I have laid down is that of democratic socialism. The method of the violent revolution and dictatorship might conceivably lead to a socialist democracy; but in the only country¹ where it has been tried, it has led to something very different, i.e., to a bureaucratic State, in which democracy does not exist. I should like to take a lesson from history. If the socialist movement in India had no freedom to use the democratic method, there could be only one way of destroying bourgeois society and bourgeois rule, that is to say, the way of violent revolution and dictatorship. But I have assumed that a full democratic State will come into being.

We have seen that Marx, as early as 1872, when political democracy had not yet risen to its full height, visualised a peaceful transition to socialism. If we were to take into consideration, as it is our duty to do as Marxists, all the social changes that have taken place since then, we would be strengthened in Marx's view. Political democracy has become far more democratic today than in Marx's time and the economic, political and ideological forces of capitalism have been completely shattered on the European continent and become much weaker in Great Britain. The power of socialism and labour is generally on the ascendant in large sectors of the globe and democratic socialist parties are in the seats of power in many countries. Even communist parties, though they do not believe in democracy, are found working today through democratic instruments, and at least in words eschewing dictatorship. The Communist Party of France, even though the largest party in the country, participated in the Constituent Assembly and is now working the democratic constitution.

In our own country, the capitalist class, even when sitting at the top in a democratic State, as we have assumed, will not have the strength of the British or American capitalist classes. It will be far weaker. Furthermore, it would be impossible to solve the economic problems of the country within the framework of

¹ The U.S.S.R.

capitalism. This will strengthen the forces working for socialism. There will be yet another factor working in the same direction. The forces gathered today in the fold of the national movement represent various sectors of the people, but overwhelmingly they represent the peasant masses and the urban middle class. This would be true if we took not only the leadership of the movement but the movement as a whole. When I assumed the capitalist class to have come on top, I assumed too that it could do so only by riding on the wave of nationalism. Apart from the fact, whether this would be possible or not, such a leadership, or success in so exploiting the national forces, would invest that class with certain responsibilities which it could not discharge consistently with its interests. The resulting disillusionment could only further strengthen the forces of socialism. Capitalism when it was a growing force in the world found it possible to assume the role of national leadership. The decadent capitalism of today cannot play this part any more.

The conclusion to which all this leads me is that in a fully democratic India the transition to socialism can be and should be a peaceful democratic process. That is to say, the future Socialist Party of India into which the present C.S.P.¹ must evolve, should, by a victory at the polls, take over the Government and the Legislature and use them in accordance with law to destroy capitalism and create socialism.

Let me turn now to the problem of creating a fully democratic India. I have said above that the fight for democracy, which has been waged these many years under the leadership of the Congress, is very near success today. But the imperial power together with its main supports, namely the Muslim League and the Princely Order, stands even now pretty solidly in our way. The soothing talk that the British have made up their minds to quit is calculated merely to deceive the people and quieten their fears, the fears being that instead of eliminating the obstacles in our path we might compromise with them and thus jeopardise freedom and democracy. Indian democracy built on the foundation of that compromise can not be full democracy, the kind of democracy I assumed above, a democracy that would offer the possibility of a peaceful transition to socialism.

¹ Congress Socialist Party.

British rule is undemocratic, Princely rule is undemocratic, communalism is undemocratic. All these three are ranged against us today. They make a powerful combination. How can we conquer these forces of reaction? Surely not by giving in to them, surely not by making concessions. Our nationalist leadership believes today that by making a few compromises with these forces it would be possible to acquire so much political power as to be able later to destroy the enemies of democracy. But it is forgotten that the political power so acquired will not be held exclusively by the forces of nationalism and democracy but also jointly by the forces of reaction. Having got into power these forces will be strengthened rather than weakened. Recent history shows that every concession hitherto made to communalism has only made it stronger till it has become the present Frankenstein. There is no reason to believe that concessions made in the future will produce a contrary result. Rather, the danger is that concessions made with regard to the basic principles of our national life would result in such a sickly and diseased India that life for her would hardly be worth living. Only a major revolution could then bring her back to healthy life.

What then is the way to defeat the forces of reaction and the enemies of democracy ranged against us? The only way is to renew the demand of "Quit India" and to mobilise the people into a final challenge with the foreign power. It is that power which is our primary enemy and which instigates and supports the reactionary forces in this country. It is that power which has to be destroyed first. It is likely that faced with a final challenge to its existence that power would attempt to rally its reactionary allies, but this danger has to be met. Even today when a policy of conciliation is being followed the same game is being played and every effort is being made to thwart the forces of freedom and democracy. In the present circumstances these efforts are succeeding to a degree where freedom and democracy are not only gravely imperilled but are being denied. It is my firm conviction that in the course of a direct struggle these efforts would not succeed to the same degree, if to any degree at all. I believe that in the fire of revolution alone can be burnt down the edifice of imperialism together with the supporting edifices of feudalism and communalism.

In other words, I clearly see a major revolution intervening on our road to socialism. I see further that the success of that revolution depends as much on its political as its social ends. In fact, I do not see that revolution succeeding if only "Quit India" were inscribed on its banners. Other objectives too its banners must proclaim: "land to him who tills it"; "wealth to him who produces it"; "*Praja Raj*¹ in the States" and others. The revolution must mobilise fully the peasants, the workers in the factories, the students, the city poor and the middle classes. Such a revolution will not only lead to the establishment of full democracy in India, but also take us a considerable way on the road to socialism. Such a revolution will place at the top not the capitalist class, but the toiling and the middle classes. While such a revolution will not destroy capitalism in one stroke it would put it on the defensive and start it on a losing race.

The Congress, which has been and remains the spearhead of the national revolution, has been slowly taking note of the economic urges of the people. The resolution on social objectives adopted by the Meerut session of the Congress² goes a very long way towards socialism. The difficulty, however, seems to be that to the dominant section of the Congress, which seems at the bottom to be guided by capitalistic ideas but which exploits the name of Mahatma Gandhi, these declarations of social policy are merely tactical moves to placate the masses in order not to lose their support. If we review the work of Congress Governments in the provinces and at the centre, we shall find, apart from words and resolutions, no concrete proof that the social policy laid down in Congress manifestos and resolutions has any binding or compelling force behind it. Therefore, the course of the transition

¹ Meaning People's Government in English.

² This session was held in November 1946. The resolution referred to here was moved by Jayaprakash Narayan himself on behalf of the Working Committee of the Congress. It declared: "In the opinion of this Congress *Swaraj* can not be real for the masses unless it makes possible the achievement of a society in which democracy extends from the political to the social and economic sphere, and in which there would be no opportunity for privileged classes to exploit the bulk of the people, nor for gross inequalities such as exist at present. Such a society would ensure individual liberty, equality of opportunity and the fullest scope for every citizen for the development of his personality."

to socialism would depend to a very large extent on the success of the socialist movement in influencing, not only in words but also in deeds, the national movement. How best can this influence be exercised? The C.S.P. has tried to fulfil this task by working both within and without the Congress. But already the question of a separation between the socialist and nationalist movements has been raised. If the possibility of an open conflict with the British were not before us, if the possibility of the Congress being driven willy nilly into this conflict were not present, if also it were not true that a national struggle could be launched in the near future only under the auspices of the Congress and not in opposition to it, I would not have hesitated to advise that the socialist movement should now part company with the Congress. But today these possibilities and considerations make such a step fraught with danger, even disaster. If, however, it is found that the Congress had forsaken the revolutionary path and was determined, whatever compromises it might have to make, to remain in the offices of Government, we should have come to the parting of ways. Under those conditions the Congress would be bound to pass more and more under the influence of vested interests and its structure to become more and more rigid and undemocratic, barring the growth of socialist forces within its fold. We have to go forward keeping both these possibilities in view.

Thus we see that the transition to socialism is not a straight path, but a tangle of conflicting paths. Therefore it is not possible to be doctrinaire about the policies of this period. I have reaffirmed my faith in democratic socialism, which is the only true socialism. I have stated clearly that in a full and untrammelled democracy I shall adopt democratic means to achieve socialism. But faced as we are with undemocratic forces which have to be defeated and destroyed before socialism can be ushered in, I conceive a period of trouble and turmoil, a revolutionary phase of the transition, a phase in which not only the democratic revolution should be completed but also considerable progress made towards socialism. A State and society emerging from such a revolution should then be able to pass in a democratic manner into full socialism.

But there may be all manner of upsets in this scheme of development. The coming revolution as visualised may not come at all, and the country may be saddled with an undemocratic rule.

Democratic methods would be of no avail then, and a different sort of revolution might take place, a revolution based on a different alignment of classes and led mainly by the socialist forces in the country which should then be organized independently as the Socialist Party of India. Or again, taking advantage of the troubled times ahead, the capitalist, feudal and communal elements might make a bid, in alliance with the right wing of the national movement, to establish their dictatorial rule. Democratic means would again be of no avail, and the only alternative would be to counter the reactionary move by establishing a dictatorship of the toiling masses, a dictatorship not of any party or the working class alone, but of the workers, the peasants and the city poor. Other developments would require other tactics, other solutions.

I said at the outset that there was only one correct path to our goal. I have not gainsaid it by what I have just written. There is indeed only one correct path from each given situation; if we followed the same unchanging path in every changing situation we can only end in disaster. What I wrote at the outset was in the context of certain ideal assumptions. It was necessary to do so in order to put my views clearly. But we cannot experiment with socialism under controlled conditions as in a laboratory. Therefore keeping our objectives in view and not departing from basic principles, we must be ready to adopt whatever methods and tactics a changing situation might demand. I realise that there are pitfalls and dangers in such a course, but it is better to face these dangers than to lose everything by being rigid and doctrinaire.

Whatever form the transition to socialism might take, I should make it clear in conclusion, that the over-all requirements for socialism to be achieved is the existence of a well-organised, powerful socialist party, supported mainly by workers' and peasants' organisations and organisations of the youth (volunteer, student, etc.) and the city poor. From small beginnings the C.S.P. has reached its present position of strength and influence. The C.S.P. is the party of socialism in this country: the party of the future. Like the country itself the C.S.P. too is passing through a transition and it must soon acquire forms that would represent and express the political and economic and social urges of the oppressed masses.

1948

6. Ends and Means*

THE decision to separate from the Congress places on us heavy responsibilities. I should like here in all humility to lay down certain principles which should guide us in our new career.

First of all, our decision to break away from the Congress will cause serious anxiety to many friends, who may have no interest in party politics but are deeply concerned over the future of the nation. I refer to those friends particularly who believe that at a moment of national crisis it was not parting of ways that was necessary but joining of hands.

We must set the minds of these friends at rest and allay their anxiety. We have not been familiar in this country with parliamentary government and consequently with the nature of democratic opposition. The sense in which we are prone to understand an opposition is the sense in which the Congress was an opposition to the British Government. The Congress used the method of direct action to destroy the British Government in India root and branch. That cannot be the nature of an opposition in a democracy. In a democracy the party in power and the party in opposition (assuming it is a democratic party itself) are both united in their loyalty to the State and pursuit of democratic methods; in times of national crisis both parties bury the hatchet and, while keeping their identities and organizations apart, join

* Adapted from the General Secretary's Report to the Sixth National Conference of the Socialist Party, held at Nasik (Maharashtra). It was here that the Socialist Party, founded in 1934 as the Congress Socialist Party and known since 1947 by its new name, decided to quit the Congress and function as an independent party.

hands to serve the nation together. In a democracy an opposition party is not an anti-national party ; rather, it is always a party that advocates a different, and according to it, a better way of serving the nation than the party in power. During the British period, to be anti-Congress was to be anti-national, because the Congress stood for the nation as against the foreigner. Now in a free India we must accustom the people to the idea that to be opposed to the Congress is not to be opposed to the nation, but rather to be opposed to certain policies and methods of government and to advocate alternative policies. Further, to be opposed to the Congress means to attempt by democratic methods to replace it as the party in power.

That the country is passing through a great internal crisis and there are external dangers of incalculable gravity no one can deny. At such a time all parties in the State, sharing common objectives and common ideals, should come together and co-operate in facing the crisis. There is much in common between the Congress and the Socialist Party : their faith in secular democracy brings them nearer together than any other two parties in the country. This naturally means that the Socialist Party shall ever be ready to fight for the defence of the State and of democracy and against the forces of communalism and reaction ; and, in this fight, it would be happy always to join hands with the Congress.

It would be our job to reassure the country of all this by deeds rather than words.

May I finally say in this connection that I am conscious that when we leave the Congress we shall leave behind many friends and valued comrades with whom our bonds of personal and ideological attachment will never snap. Even when working outside, it shall be our endeavour to strengthen their hands ; and I hope that by functioning as an opposition we shall make their task lighter and their path easier.

I seek your indulgence now to bear with me in examining a problem that has deeply worried me of late. The problem is that of methods or means. It is important for us, both in the light of our impending decision to break away from the Congress and of the tragic events that have recently taken place.¹

¹ The reference here is to the Hindu-Muslim riots and the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.

In the West, opposition parties do not consider it wrong to use lies and falsehood to bring the rival party into disrepute; they do not consider it wrong to practise bribery and corruption to achieve favourable results at elections. There are certain parties, which go much beyond lies and corruption. For them even murder, loot and arson are a part of political strategy. We have witnessed this strategy unfold its bottomless tragedies in the past months.

From time immemorial there have been politicians who have preached that there is no such thing as ethics in politics. In the old times, however, this amorality did not spread its corrupting influence beyond a small class that played at politics, and the mass of the people were left uncorrupted by what the leaders and ministers of State did. But since the rise of totalitarianism, which includes both Fascism-Nazism and Stalinism, this principle has been applied on a mass scale and every individual in society has been affected by it. This has resulted in such an eclipse of moral values from social life that not only its political sector has been darkened but every sector of human life, including even family life.

Since the victory of Stalinist methods in Russia, it has been commonly believed that there is no room for moral values in Marxism, and it is usual for a socialist who talks of such matters to be branded as a renegade or, at the least, a deviationist. I should, therefore, like to state before you in the clearest possible terms that I for one have come to believe that for the achievement of socialism a strict regard for means is of the highest importance. Socialism means different things to different persons, but if by socialism we mean a form of society in which the material needs of every individual are satisfied and also in which the individual is a cultured and civilised being, is free and brave, kind and generous, then I am absolutely clear that we will never reach this goal except by strict adherence to certain human values and standards of conduct. It is too often believed that all would be well only if there were no exploitation in society and everyone was well fed and clothed and housed. But a society of well fed and clothed and housed *brutes* is a far cry from socialism.

There were many things that Mahatma Gandhi taught us. But the greatest thing he taught us was that means are ends, that evil means can never lead to good ends and that fair ends require fair means. Some of us may have been sceptical of this truth, but

recent world events and events at home have convinced me that nothing but good means will enable us to reach the goal of a good society, which is socialism.

When, in a statement the other day, I talked of the need of spiritual regeneration, some of you might have thought perhaps that I had been so deeply shaken by recent happenings that I was trying to escape from the hard realities of life. Those of you who might have thought so are completely mistaken. I have no knowledge of matters spiritual, if the term is understood in a religious or metaphysical sense. I have not suddenly come to acquire faith in something called the spirit or the soul or Brahma. Such philosophy as I have is earthy and human. I am concerned merely with the problem of the type of men I should like to live with in society. Clearly, I do not like to live in a society of liars and murderers, of men who have no kindness in them, no tolerance, no fellow-feeling.

No one can say what human nature is; but this much can be said that it is what you make of it. A good man is not born. He becomes good by training. Therefore, if the aim of our Party is not only to produce well-fed, well-clothed and well-housed animals, but also to produce good men, then I say that all our political work must be inspired by certain ethical values. I hope that you will give this viewpoint the consideration it deserves.

I crave your indulgence again to permit me to examine another problem from a somewhat unorthodox point of view. There is a view held by some that all politics are power politics. I consider this to be a disastrous point of view. I shall examine here two important aspects of this way of thinking. First, let us see how it affects Party organization. Those who hold this view should logically make every attempt—I do not say that they are actually doing so—to secure power within the Party itself. And power, according to this view, being the quintessence of politics, the use of every kind of means may be considered justified to secure it, including means such as lying, scandal-mongering and cheating at Party elections. Clearly—and I hope all of us would agree—such means could only result in the complete disintegration of the Party. I, therefore, hope and pray that every one of us will reject all such means and eschew all quest for power within the Party. It is human to yearn for recognition and aspire for positions of influence and

leadership. But one should be content to reach these positions by virtue of one's work and service done to the cause.

The second aspect of this view which I wish to examine here has a far deeper and wider significance. The theory that all politics are power politics has the necessary underlying basis—though this may not be obvious to the protagonists of this theory—that the State is the only instrument of social good. In other words, those who subscribe to this theory believe—unless they are mere self-seekers, in which case unworthy of notice—that they must capture the State in order to be able to serve society and bring about the social transformation they desire.

I reject this view completely. The Congress today has captured the State, but every thinking Congressman will agree that the Congress would completely undermine itself if it depended on the State for every effort at social change and development. In fact the view is growing among the constructive workers in the Congress that they must cut themselves off from the parliamentary machine and function independently so as to serve both society and the State.

The experience of totalitarian countries, whether fascist or communist, has shown that if the State is looked upon as the sole agent of social reconstruction, we get nothing but a regimented society in which the State is all-powerful and popular initiative is extinct and the individual is made a cog in a vast unhuman machine. Such a society is surely not the objective of our Party; nor could a society of this nature ever be an intermediate stage in the evolution of the democratic socialist society that is our aim.

Democracy requires that the people should depend as little as possible on the State. And, both according to Mahatma Gandhi and Karl Marx, the highest stage of democracy is that in which the State has withered away. Totalitarianism, as distinct from a transitional "dictatorship" of millions of toilers over a small defeated class of vested interests, can hardly be a half-way house to full democracy. It is necessary for the growth of full democracy that popular effort has the freest possible chance and that the people, through varied kinds of economic and cultural organizations and institutions, are enabled and encouraged to improve their condition and manage their affairs.

Accordingly, the type of mind that I should like to see develop within the Party is one that would make every one of us indifferent to whether one is Prime Minister of the Republic or a trade union or other field worker. I believe that whether or not we have the government in our hands, if we succeed by constructive work in creating a sound trade union movement capable of running industry; in educating the working class in the arts of citizenship; in creating cooperative communities in the villages; in mobilising the youth and children as voluntary servants of the nation; in creating cultural influences that go down even to the most backward sections of the people; if we succeed in eradicating caste, superstition and bigotry; if we succeed in enlisting the cooperation of hundreds of thousands of selfless workers to whom the seats of power offer no attraction—if we succeed in all this, we shall also succeed in building up a socialist society. In this event, the State will inevitably become a socialist State and will play its inevitable and appointed role, which would go little beyond the *imprimatur* of the law on what has already been accomplished, or on what cannot be prevented from happening. The State in this manner will only be an instrument in the hands of a popular socialist movement—i.e., of the people organized independently of the State for a socialist way of living—rather than the source and fountain-head of all authority and will.

These observations are of particular significance in the context of the historic decision we are about to take. The temptation for members of an opposition party to look always to the seats of power is great. We must keep this temptation in check. We must remember today, and never forget it in the coming years, that it would be by constructive work rather than by the tactics of a parliamentary opposition, by positive service rather than by exploiting the mistakes and faults of others, that we would succeed in establishing a democratic socialist society.

I might refer here briefly to an important corollary to what I have said above. In a revolutionary party, i.e., a party that aims at fundamental social change, there are always a parliamentary wing and a wing made up of field workers. A time inevitably comes when a conflict arises between these wings as to which should dominate the other. Such a conflict has already arisen within the Congress, which at least has had a revolutionary past;

and the victory has already gone to the parliamentary wing. In this event, the field or constructive workers of the Congress would probably separate and form themselves into an independent body of social servants. We, on the other hand, should so develop our Party that constructive and parliamentary work are integrated together and the constructive workers have the dominant voice. Only then could the Party become a fit instrument of full democracy.

Before I close I feel I should say something about the problem of left unity. Since the re-organization of the Party, the problem has often come up for discussion at Party meetings and in the *Policy Statement*¹ there is a clear declaration about our relations with the Communist Party. The question has been raised again, and members of the Party have wondered what our policy should be. I should like to deal with this question of left unity in two parts: (1) unity with the Communist Party and (2) unity with the others.

As far as the Communist Party is concerned, our policy has been unambiguous. World events have underlined that policy. The fact that communist parties are subservient to Russia has received the endorsement of current history—the latest proof coming from Czechoslovakia. Those whose eyes even Czechoslovakia has not opened can be nothing else than conscious tools of the communists. Is unity possible with the fifth columnists of a foreign power? We may be as friendly as we wish to the foreign power itself; but surely we would be mortgaging the freedom of our country if we let foreign agents grow in prestige and influence.

Recent developments have also shown up the character of communist "democracy". In the *Policy Statement* we have said that not only we differ from the communists on the question of loyalties but also on that of objectives: whereas we aim at democratic socialism, the communists believe in totalitarianism. To that the communists reply that they have their own form of democracy. What that form is in reality has once again been demonstrated in Czechoslovakia. Communist democracy is so perfect that democrats like Jan Masaryk cannot survive its foulness and Benes, the head of the State, cannot be allowed to be at large.

¹ Issued in 1947.

The third basic difference between the Socialist and Communist parties, to which the *Statement of Policy* refers, is the difference regarding methods. Reverting to Czechoslovakia again, communist methods are in full bloom there for all those but the blind to see. In our own country those methods are once again being unfolded. A lying propaganda has been let loose against our Party by the communist press and its various fronts. I have a personal taste of this propaganda as President of the Railwaymen's Federation. Till the time the communists subscribed to the slogan, "Nehru Sarkar Zindabad", every settlement with the Railway Board was welcomed as a great victory. Now, when their line has been reversed and they are out to strike at the very roots of the Indian State, settlements no less generous are being described as sell-out and I am personally being attacked as having been bought out by the Railway Board. That is the kind of method this Party follows, while raising simultaneously the slogan of left unity. There can be nothing in common between our and communist methods.

The conclusion, therefore, at which I arrive is that unity with the Communist Party must be resolutely ruled out if the Socialist Party seriously believes in freedom and democratic socialism.

In this connection, I must warn you all that, as elsewhere in the world, the communists are going to take advantage of the democratic character of our Party to infiltrate into it, to plant their stooges within it and try to split it and finally destroy it. If you are not vigilant, if you are taken in by their special pleading, if even for a moment you come to believe in their *bona-fides*, you open the door to the ruin of the Party. Every one of you must be on guard and must make the people aware of the communist menace. There are signs that suggest an Eastern Cominform. This makes the communist menace more menacing.

After the 15th of August 1947, the tasks of our Party are constructive. We have to build up a new India. The communists, on the other hand, are not interested in building up anything at all. Their interest is in creating disturbances and troubles so as to exploit them to popularise their Party, and to weaken the Indian State. A strong India becoming the focus of a third force will not suit the communists and they will do everything in their power to prevent the regeneration of their country. So much for the communists.

As far as other leftist groups are concerned, it would be necessary to go into the programme and policy of each group and then only the question of unity can be settled. Just because a group is dubbed leftist, it need not follow that we must work with it. There are several leftist groups in the country whose difference with the Communist Party is as narrow as between twiddledum and twiddledee. These groups accept *in toto* the objective of totalitarianism and the amoralism of communist methods. Their only quarrel with the communists is that they do not worship Stalin, but they have other Gods to worship and their attitude towards Russia is only a little removed from subservience. Further, the appreciation that some of these leftist groups have of the situation in India is fundamentally different from ours. For instance, there are groups which say that the Nehru Government is a Kerensky Government which has to be overthrown by violence; and these groups endeavour towards that end. In these circumstances how is unity with these groups possible?

I have always held, and nothing has happened recently to compel me to change that view, that there is only one method by which the left can consolidate its forces and acquire sufficient strength to challenge the right and play an effective part in national politics. A number of small leftist groups, each with its own denominational dogmas and petty rivalries, banded together in a loose consolidation can hardly give the type of united lead to the masses that would be necessary. Differences and jealousies would arise and would ever be a source of weakness. Any fundamental issue may threaten to disrupt it. The left, if it has to become a political force, must be organized within the folds of one single party, which should have strength enough to lead the people on the basis of a consistent programme of action. Without any sense of partiality, merely as a statement of objective fact, I state that today the Socialist Party is the only party in the country which can play this role. Now, when we are emerging as an independent party, I have no doubt that we shall invite such leftist groups or individuals as may agree with the basic policies of the Party to join forces with it and build up one single socialist movement in the country. I have no doubt the Socialist Party would welcome with open arms all such leftists as may agree to join forces.

1950

7. Democratic Socialism: the Ideal and the Method*

SINCE its birth as the Congress Socialist Party sixteen years ago the Party has slowly and painfully been working out its basic ideals and its methodology. This process is not complete yet, but a fairly clear-cut body of thought has already been created which distinguishes the Socialist Party from other leftist parties in the country.

The roots of the Socialist Party are in the Indian soil. Indian history and background and experiences of the past sixteen years have moulded and shaped it; as also international socialist thought and the experiences of socialist reconstruction in Europe and elsewhere. It was as a result of this process of ideological evolution that when the Party was reorganised at the end of the August Revolution and was meeting in its first post-war conference at Kanpur [1947], Democratic Socialism came to be inscribed so indelibly on its banner.

Those, however, who have not gone through the same experiences and shared the same background will not easily understand either the need for laying stress on Democratic Socialism or the real significance of that term. For the new enthusiast, with a smattering of the obvious writings of Marx-Engels-Lenin, the issue of Democratic Socialism is likely to appear to be a fruitless repetition of an issue settled long ago. Mentally he still lives in the age when one contrasted the failures of European social democracy with the brilliant successes of Lenin.

* Adapted from the General Secretary's Report to the Eighth National Conference of the Socialist Party held at Madras.

But years have rolled by since then, years of poignant and tragic history, of lost dreams and of the very God that failed. Of all this he is blissfully ignorant and is hardly aware of the basic problems of present-day socialism and of the brave efforts still being made to rescue the heart of socialism from its shell. He still bandies the words 'reformist' and 'revolutionary' and has not yet realised that the revolutionary has turned a reactionary.

One reason why the new enthusiast is in this state of mental development is that in the enthusiasm of his conversion, the new words he has learned, the new phrases and formulae, become all important and their substance is taken for granted. Socialist theories are more real to him than socialist values, to achieve which those theories were evolved. He assumes that the theories will inevitably lead to the values; so, when the theories become a State religion he assumes that the values have been realised and socialism established on earth. The phenomenon is common in the history of religions.

Socialism is not merely anti-capitalism, nor statism. Nationalization of industry and collectivization of agriculture are important aspects of socialist economy; but in themselves they are not socialism. Under socialism there is no exploitation of man by man, no injustice and oppression, no insecurity and an equitable distribution of wealth and services and opportunities. Now, even in a nationalised and collectivised economy there may be exploitation, injustice, oppression, insecurity and glaring inequalities. If under such an economy, all political and economic power is concentrated in the hands of a party oligarchy, irreplaceable and self-perpetuating, there can be no socialism but its suppression, no revolution but reaction. The Communist in as much as he believes in and works for just such an oligarchical society is a reactionary rather than a revolutionary.

The Party, therefore, felt that unless the goals of socialism were clearly defined and steadfastly adhered to, there was danger again of the revolution being betrayed. The aims of the socialist movement which needed to be emphasised were not mere overthrow of the capitalist order and establishment of a party dictatorship, but the creation of a society of free and equal peoples, a society based on certain values of human and social life, values which could never be sacrificed in the name of

theory or the Party line or expedience of any sort. In the noble words of Ignazio Silone : " On a group of theories one can found a school ; but on a group of values one can found a culture, a civilization, a new way of living together among men." Socialism is not just a school of thought, but a new culture, a new civilization.

Since the Party declared its faith in Democratic Socialism two attitudes seem to have developed among the membership. A common and rather widespread attitude has been that of acceptance of the objective but without any living faith in it. Democratic Socialism did not become for these comrades a burning inspiration or an article of faith. While arguments convinced the mind, the heart remained cold. Democratic Socialism was intellectually satisfying perhaps, but it failed to evoke that emotional response which makes men die for their ideas. This was due to the pre-occupation with theories and neglect of values. These comrades have not fully understood the objectives they are fighting for. If we are not fighting merely for power or the " dictatorship of the proletariat," but for certain values, if we are fighting against exploitation, injustice and tyranny of every kind, Democratic Socialism alone can be our goal ; and it cannot but evoke in us that loyalty, zeal and devotion with which even a handful of men can move a mountain. That intensity of feeling is lacking in many of us. That is why though there are thousands of workers in the Party, the total output of work is comparatively so little, and that is also why there is such lack of teamwork and co-operation. I am confident, however, that as convictions deepen and as the understanding of the values of Democratic Socialism grows, faith and devotion too will grow.

There are other comrades, as I have said above,—their number though is small—who accepted Democratic Socialism with the tongue in the cheek, and who fancy themselves as real revolutionaries. They have never ceased to sneer at the very fundamentals of the Party to which they belong. To such I have a very clear advice to give : " For heaven's sake, go." I do not wish to argue with them as to who is the real revolutionary among us. That issue is being decided by history.

Therefore, I say to those who have no faith in Democratic Socialism : " go ". Their going will not mean disintegration of the Party, rather, it would mean integration and the acquisition

of greater strength by greater internal unity and harmony. There are many parties in this country selling revolution on easy terms. I say to our pseudo-revolutionaries: "Go and choose from them and make your revolution even though it may be in a tea cup." And I say further to them: "For heaven's sake go and don't practise a fraud upon yourself and the socialist movement by glibly professing verbal allegiance to Democratic Socialism and doing everything by word and deed to deny it." If there are agents of other parties trying to infiltrate, let me say to them: "You are wasting your time; not even the Communist Party was able to disrupt or swallow up the Socialist Party."

The methods of the Democratic Socialist Movement are different from the methods of Communism. We eschew the unclean and unscrupulous methods that the Communists follow. Even in intra-party struggles between power groups, they practise lying and deceit, character assassination, kidnapping and shooting. There is evidence that there are some in our Party who too are not averse to these unclean methods. Let me warn that these methods will be given no quarter and where reasonable proof is available, drastic action will be taken.

Recently attempts have been made to form groups within the Party and though these groups are mainly based on personal ambitions, sometimes an ideological cloak is thrown over them. But whether the groups are ideological or personal, groupism or factionalism will never be allowed. The Party is democratic in its constitution and working and every member of the Party has full freedom to express his views. Even office-bearers of the Party have been given the opportunity to express disagreement with the official Party line through the Party Letter. But permanent groupings and factions will never be permitted. If ever they are, the Party will cease to be a party and will become a loose conglomeration of groups fighting among themselves for power and position. Such a party can achieve nothing.

For the last three years we have debated the correctness of the method to be used to achieve socialism. While the Party as a whole has accepted the democratic method, here too, as in the case of the final goals, there has been an undercurrent of stubborn scepticism and lack of faith. As a result, all of us have not worked as a team, and our actions have often had the stamp of tentativeness.

The Party's *Policy Statement* clearly says that there are two roads to the social revolution : (1) the road of armed mass rising or the insurrectionary method ; (2) the peaceful or democratic method. The *Policy Statement* elucidates these terms further and distinguishes the insurrectionary method from mere violence or terrorism or putschism, and the democratic method from mere constitutionalism. The *Statement* goes further and declares categorically that in the present conditions of India, and future anticipated conditions, the democratic method is the " only " right method to work for socialism. There is thus no ambiguity in Party policy on this score. Yet, there are complaints that our policy is not clearly defined in this regard. The confusion, no doubt, is in the minds of the critics, for they do not fully understand the implications of the democratic method.

There are other critics whose complaint is not that our policy is ambiguous, but that it is wrong. According to them, to say that it is possible to establish socialism without bloodshed is to dupe the workers. For them there is only one road to socialism : that of a blood-soaked revolution. They quote Marx's authority for this dogmatic assertion. Let me therefore quote Marx. This is what Marx said in the course of a notable speech on tactics at The Hague Convention of the International Workingmen's Association (the " First International ") in 1872 :

The worker must one day capture political power in order to found the new organisation of labour. He must reverse the old policy, which the old institutions maintain, if he will not, like the Christians of old who despised and neglected such things, renounce the things of this world. But we do not assert that the way to reach this goal is the same everywhere. We know that the institutions, the manners, and the customs of the various countries must be considered, and we do not deny that there are countries like England and America, and, if I understand your arrangements better, I might even add Holland, where the worker may attain his object by peaceful means. But not in all countries is this the case.

If the critics do not hold that Marx was temporarily demented when he delivered his famous inaugural address, they will see that they had completely misunderstood him. Let it, therefore, be

clearly understood that it is as un-Marxian to hold that only an armed revolution can lead to socialism as to assert that only a peaceful method can do so. The correct Marxian position is that either method can be used, but that which of the two is suitable to a particular situation can be determined only by the relevant historical and objective conditions. In a given situation only one method is the right method, but only the facts of the situation, and no 'a priori' dogmatising, can decide which method is right.

To this the critics reply that the situation today is not what it was in Marx's days, and that in the existing world conditions socialism can never be achieved by peaceful methods! It is a healthy sign to try to correct Marx, but if the process of re-thinking does not follow the scientific method of Marx, it is likely to degenerate into mere rationalisation of pre-conceived notions. When Marx spoke at The Hague Convention, reaction was reigning supreme in Continental Europe and even in England and Holland political democracy had not fully developed. Today, one-sixth of the world is under Soviet communism and China and the whole of Eastern Europe and part of Central Europe are communist. In Scandinavia and Great Britain there are socialist governments and strong co-operative movements. In other countries of Western Europe there is at least full political democracy and, as a result of the last war, European capitalism lies shattered. Imperialism is also on the decline and India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon are already independent countries. Elsewhere also the chains of imperialism are loosened. In America the New Deal initiated a progress towards the welfare state which has not yet been checked and there has been, since the war years, a tremendous resurgence of labour. Elsewhere in the world too the forces of democracy are to the fore more than ever before. Therefore, while it is true that the situation today is different from what it was in the days of Marx, the difference is all in favour of a peaceful evolution of socialism.

The forces of socialism are incomparably stronger today than in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In India, in spite of the limitations on civil liberties and the Preventive Detention Act, the fact remains that there is a large scope for the democratic forms of political activity. Even the present restrictions on civil liberties might go if the democratic forces in the country grow stronger. There can be no manner of doubt that if Marxian

methodology were to be applied to India, it would be the democratic method that would have to be selected. In any case, what is the alternative that the critics suggest? To this question there has been no positive answer.

One alternative is that offered by the Communist Party. In a democratic climate they deliberately embraced violence and committed murder, loot and arson. They, of course, believed that they were working for an insurrection and following a revolutionary method. But in reality they were merely practising terrorism. What fruits the Communist Party of India has gathered from the use of violence, the past two years have clearly shown. Not only does communism stand discredited today in this country, but even the much-vaunted unity and solidarity of the Communist Party have proved to be a myth and there is utter disruption and ideological confusion in their ranks.

I have not come across a single member of the Socialist Party who actually advocates communist methods, and yet there has been criticism and scepticism about our own methods of work. I have vainly tried to find a middle course between our own democratic methods and the violent methods of the Indian Communist Party. There are more than half-a-dozen small socialist groups in the country, most of them in Bengal, who are loud in their denunciation of the Socialist Party. I have, however, not discovered that any one of them is following any new technique. Whatever lip service they may be rendering to brave revolutionary slogans, in actual practice they seem to be following exactly the same method as ours. Those that are not are following the only alternative: the communist method.

I should like to digress here a little. There has been a considerable talk about recent changes in communist strategy. It is necessary that we fully appreciate these developments. The policy that Ranadive¹ seemed to be following was to bring about a social revolution on the classical lines of Russia, i.e., a revolution in which there was a general and armed mass upheaval which smashed established authority and gave birth to a new revolutionary state.² That method was bound to fail and has failed. An armed mass insurrection cannot be engineered

¹ Then General Secretary of the Communist Party of India.

² This policy was adopted in 1948 and embodied in what was generally known as the Calcutta Thesis.

at will. Failure of the method was bound to force a change in policy. The changed strategy seems to mean substitution of the Chinese pattern in place of the classical Russian. Terroristic and violent activities will on the whole stop, and in the urban areas the communists are likely to follow a more respectable policy and strive once again to win over the middle class. At the same time, they are likely to concentrate in certain selected rural areas and there violent activities are likely to be intensified with a view to establish in some part of the country a communist pocket—a 'red' India. This method too is bound to fail, because Republican India is not only different from Czarist Russia but also from war-torn China of a quarter of a century ago.

At the time when the communists succeeded in establishing their little State in a red pocket of China, the Nationalist Government was fighting a life and death struggle with powerful war-lords, some of whom had even the support of certain foreign powers. Chiang Kai-shek considered Chang Tso-lin and the other war-lords a greater danger to the Chinese Republic than Mao's small Red China; so while, one by one, he crushed the war-lords and integrated China, Mao's red pocket grew in strength and area. When at a certain stage Chiang turned to the reds in South China, the entire communist State migrated hundreds of miles away to the north-west. Meanwhile, Chiang's attention was drawn elsewhere, and in that remote corner of China, more or less contiguous with Soviet Asia, Mao developed and grew. While Nationalist China was slowly integrated, the State remained a military dictatorship. There were no democratic forms and no constitution and no elections were held.

Now, none of these conditions exists in this country. Here we have a central government whose writ runs from the Himalayas to the Cape. We have a central army and no war-lords. We had a Constituent Assembly which has given us a democratic constitution however inadequate it may be. There is adult franchise in the country, and opposition parties that do not openly embrace violence are allowed to function. General elections have been announced for the next year. Under these conditions it would never be possible for a 'red' pocket to be created or for that pocket slowly to envelope the whole country. Even in China it is doubtful if Mao could ever have achieved a victory over Nationalist China had not the Japanese

war intervened and had not Japan surrendered in Manchuria to a Russian army. Therefore, I repeat that the Cominform's latest directive to Indian communists to follow Mao Tse-tung is bound to be as total a failure as the previous directive which was the basis of the Calcutta Thesis of the Communist Party, passed two and half years ago.

Coming back to the question I was examining, it seems to me that the only difference between the Socialist Party and the other socialist groups that criticise us for our insistence on the democratic method is, that, while in actual practice all of them follow the same method, they keep on repeating to themselves, in order to fortify as it were their faith in their revolutionary character, that Socialism can never come through peaceful means.

To follow peaceful means today and to hold dogmatically that at the last stage violence would somehow be essential seems to be the position of these groups. On the other hand, the position that the Socialist Party takes is a perfectly Marxian one, namely, that in the present conditions democratic means alone are the right means, and further that, if the democratic way of life develops and abides in India, the same means would be right even at the final stage of the struggle for Socialism.

If, however, conditions change, and all of us, including the bravely talking revolutionaries, fail to stop the growth of fascism in this country, it is elementary Marxism that democratic methods would become ineffective. But, in the first place, there is no need to be faint-hearted and accept defeat before the battle has been joined. I am confident that, if the democratic forces in this country functioned properly and effectively, it would be possible to prevent fascism and to build up and preserve democracy. In the second place, even if the situation were to change later, what is it that has to be done today in anticipation except what is being done now to prepare and organise the masses through the present methods?

If by following democratic methods the Socialist Party succeeds in winning the allegiance of the masses and in making them politically conscious and organisationally strong, even an appeal to mass insurrection would be likely to receive an effective response. That the masses may have to resort to such a course and seize power by mass action, if the ruling powers make democracy

ineffective is and should always be a part of the political education that we endeavour to give to them.

In the course of my talks with Party members I have sometimes come across an undercurrent of feeling that while violent methods yield speedy results the democratic methods might mean a long drawn out slogging game at the wickets. Nothing can be farther from the truth than this. Russia itself is an example of how long it took for violent methods to succeed. And, without the first World War, who can tell if the Bolshevik revolution could ever have come in 1917? At present China has become a common illustration of the effectiveness of violence. It is forgotten, however, that the struggle in China has taken at least two decades and but for the intervention of World War II, Mao's victories could never have been assured or come at the time they did.

We come back to the conclusion, therefore, that in our given conditions there is no alternative to the democratic method. What then is this method?

Before I proceed to answer this question, let me remove a possible misunderstanding. Just as there are those for whom there is no alternative in any circumstances to the insurrectionary method, there are also those who would under no conditions take recourse to insurrection. The attitude of the latter would be equally incompatible with the Party's fundamental faith, and there can be no place in the Party for them.

Returning to answer the question posed above, it will be remembered that the *Policy Statement* has distinguished the democratic method from constitutionalism. The Socialist Party is not a mere parliamentary party. As a matter of fact, the Socialist Party hardly exists in the Parliament. The Party is a revolutionary party and while it may use the parliamentary method it relies for its success mainly on its work outside parliament and among the people.

While it is a part of the democratic method to capture parliament through elections and to form a government, the Socialist Party believes that a social revolution, even after the capture of power, would have to be carried out by the people themselves, aided and guided as they may be by the socialist State.

A mere parliamentary party is little more than an election machine and relies on propaganda alone. But the Socialist Party is not an election machine and it does not rely on propaganda

alone. The Party organises at the same time trade unions, kisan panchayats, youth leagues. It carries on agitation and fights for the people. It conducts local struggles, strikes and 'satyagrahas'. It may have to launch even a national struggle if and when the situation demands and advises. It also carries on constructive work. It builds co-operatives, roads, tanks, bunds. It conducts workers' education and it does many other things.

Organisation, propaganda, agitation, struggle and constructive work may be summed up as the five different kinds of activities which we carry on today and which are all comprised within the term "democratic method." The object of all our activities is not merely to win elections, but to serve the people, to organise them to fight for and protect their rights and interests and ultimately to enable them through collective mass effort to establish a socialist State and create a socialist society.

There is one type of criticism which I shall admit is valid. In applying the democratic method mistakes may be committed. Where action was needed, inaction might have been ordered, and 'vice versa'. However, in examining any specific application of a method, we should not be guided by preconceived notions. For instance, there is a tendency in some quarters to say that it matters little whether a strike succeeds or fails. The real object is not to achieve specific advantages for labour through collective bargaining, but to create a spirit of militancy and hostility to the established order.

I cannot conceive of a more foolish and shortsighted principle than this. This is exactly the policy which the communists had been following for the last twenty-five years in this country. But where are their militants among the working classes today and what have these militants achieved? The communists have brought only demoralisation by their ill-conceived methods and militancy.

Militancy is not inculcated by a mood of defeat and bitterness but by understanding and conviction. That worker is militant who has deep convictions and a clear understanding of what he is fighting for. We can help the workers to acquire conviction and understanding by political education and hard, patient work. Struggle mellows and hardens the worker, but this does not mean that we must rush into every foolhardy strike or get up a synthetic struggle every day. An ill-conceived, ill-timed and ill-organised

struggle will do more harm than good. As far as creation of feeling against the established order of things is concerned, it is not necessary to manufacture struggles to do that.

The feeling exists today, engendered by the misdeeds of the ruling classes. The task is to convert all this dissatisfaction into organised political consciousness and vital political action. I have tried in this report to sum up the controversy that has been going on in the ranks of the Socialist Party for the last three years, and I should like this Conference finally to put a stop to it. We cannot go on arguing about our fundamentals indefinitely. If the foundations were to be pulled out every time they are laid, no structure can be ever built.

I am aware that in achieving this ideological clarification in the Party we too have failed to discharge our duties. The literature that was necessary for this was not produced. But it will not be denied that slowly a body of writing has been growing on this matter. It has, however, been my unfortunate experience that our comrades do not even try to read the literature that is available. The Party journals are obviously the best instrument for Party education, but it is not unoften that I have found that while Party members would read cheap, sensational and vulgar journals with avidity, they would not even look at the organs published by the Party. I have also come across Party comrades who have not even studied the *Policy Statement*, much less the resolutions of the Party. It is not unnatural, therefore, that there should be so much ideological confusion.

Clarification of fundamentals has become essential from another point of view too. With the recent shift in communist policy there is likely to be a drive at infiltration and the familiar slogans of united front and leftist unity are again likely to be raised. If our workers are not very clear as to what they stand for, the Party is likely to be weakened by unnecessary internal controversies engineered by stooges of others.

Before I conclude, I should like to say that while our aims and hopes are high we should work with the detachment that the *Geeta* teaches and neither success nor failure should enthuse or dishearten us. Our joy should be in our work and in the conviction that victory ultimately is bound to be ours. We must carry on, no matter how long the struggle. I am afraid there is a mentality growing in the Party which is only interested in

quick results. Many have been heard to say that the results of the forthcoming general elections would decide the future of the Party. I have no doubt that the Party will make a great showing at the elections, but it will not make the least difference to me if the Party were completely swept off the board. Indeed, for me, such a result would be a further challenge and a spur to greater efforts. I hope all of you will work in that same spirit and the only return that you will seek will be the satisfaction that you have done your duty.

1953

8. Minimum Programme for National Reconstruction*

On train to Gaya

March 4, 1953.

My dear Bhai,

I could not send you the draft programme without consulting my colleagues. It is now enclosed with this letter.

Let me make a few introductory remarks.

I meet you after long periods and get the impression that you are not in touch with what we have been doing or saying or thinking. The last few times that I met you, I heard you repeat some points practically in the same language. For instance, your remarks about nationalisation. I am afraid we are, in your mind, doctrinaire socialists who insist on sticking to outworn formulas. But had you cared to know better the evolution of thinking in our movement, you would not have found the need of impressing upon us the empirical and changing processes of socialist reconstruction.

I assure you our approach to socialism is not doctrinaire, hide-bound or conservative. But I must make one point clear. No matter how empirical and experimental may be our approach, the goals and values of socialism are unalterably fixed before us. Whether we give it or not the name of any ism, we all desire without the shadow of any doubt to create a new society in which there is no exploitation, in which there is economic and social equality, in which there is freedom and well-being for

* Letter to Prime Minister Nehru.

all. Further, these goals, for us or for that matter for any socialist, are not to be achieved in a distant future but in the soonest possible time.

You had written once to me, when you were perhaps a little rattled, that while you thought that socialism was not the monopoly of any group, you were not, in any case, a "formal" socialist. You perhaps meant that you did not subscribe to any particular theory of socialism. But you could not have meant to say that you did not accept the aims and values of socialism. Those values and aims give direction and create a sense of urgency which, you will agree, have been lacking in your policies. A great deal can be said for caution and fearing to create too many upsets, but in the balance, if one has a definite political philosophy, one must act and move boldly towards one's goals. The move must be rapid and drastic at the beginning, when a new departure has to be made, than in the middle or at the end of the process. The move, further, must be such that the mass of people are able to appreciate and understand and realise that they are on the move. Sometimes a right move may be made, but at such levels and points that it is beyond the understanding of the man in the street.

I should like also to place before you another ideological consideration. We have all been deeply influenced by Gandhiji. I do not mind saying that I have been rediscovering him lately and reunderstanding him. I believe he was one of the most vital thinkers of the modern age. I am sure there is a great deal to learn from him today and also tomorrow. I am sure, had he lived, he would have evolved further, as he ceaselessly did, and we would have today a clearer picture of the method he would have followed to achieve the goals that we jointly share. I do not find today Gandhiji's dynamism and incessant quest towards his ultimate values except in Vinoba, who has produced a remarkably Gandhian method for the solution of the country's biggest problem—the land problem. I feel sure that the Gandhians and the Socialists, dropping their respective jargons, must work together. I have said all this only to emphasise that I do not find in your policies any, or marked, awareness of these considerations. When the policies of the Government of India make a concession to Gandhi, well, it is just a concession.

Let me place a third consideration before you. China and India are the two countries in Asia to which all Asia and Africa

are looking. If India fails to present anything but a pale picture of a *welfare state* (which phrase I do not particularly like; Gandhiji's and Vinoba's *Sarvodaya* is a far better phrase) I am afraid the appeal of China would become irresistible and that would affect the lives of millions and change the course of history disastrously.

May I also point out that you seem to have been unduly impressed with the chits that foreigners have given your government. I would not rate those chits too high. Often those foreigners do not share our common objectives. Often they come expecting to see a backward people just learning to manage their affairs, and when they find the Parliament, the Central Secretariat, the Damodar Valley Corporation, the polished English—well, they are just charmed, whereas we have our own ambitions and wish to start where both the East and West have ended up and build a society in advance to theirs (not in material wealth). Our measuring rods must necessarily be different from those of the foreign visitors, and we must pass a severer judgment on ourselves.

With this as a background let me turn to the question before us. The proposal that you made to me was a bold and unusual one, because the Congress Party stood in no need of a coalition either at the Centre or in most of the States. But you rose above partisan considerations and took a statesmanlike step. What you proposed was, to my mind, not a parliamentary coalition in the accepted sense of the term, but a joint effort to build a new India. We are not a power in the legislatures, but we do claim to have a following in the country and a cadre which in some respects is superior to that of the Congress—a cadre which has some training and a distinct political philosophy, which in itself is a valuable thing.

I think it is the common people's wish that their leaders, irrespective of parties, should join hands to serve them and make their lot better. If a joint effort were made by us, great hopes would be aroused, and in the event of a failure, i.e., in the event of the people finding out that in spite of the joint effort their lot remained unchanged, the frustration would be so complete that nothing could save the country from eventual chaos and disintegration. The task of national integration of which you spoke the other day cannot be accomplished under static

conditions. If we moved forward in new directions of social and economic change, the forces of integration would be vastly strengthened. The emotional and psychological climate that would be created should prove to be a powerful binding force.

Therefore a great deal would depend on how you conceived your own move in asking for our cooperation. If it means only this that a few of us are to be added to your Cabinet and some of the State cabinets to strengthen the Government and your hands in carrying out your present policies, the attempt would not be worth making. But if it means launching upon a bold joint venture of national reconstruction, it might well have been a historic move. You do not have unlimited time and it is now that you must act.

It is in this perspective that the draft programme was prepared. It is not too ambitious a programme, and it can be carried out in the next four years if all of us make a determined effort.

First, we have suggested that certain constitutional reforms must be made. I for one was never able to understand how you permitted yourself to approve of such a drab and conservative constitution. However, while drastic changes may be made in it later, there are some amendments which should be made immediately if the social and economic revolution that has to be wrought is at all to progress.

Second, the whole system of administration must be overhauled. While every one agrees with this, nothing or next to nothing is being done about it. Reform must be drastic and must affect all levels. We should also make up our mind as to what kind of political system we want. Centralization of political power and authority would be disastrous. We must deliberately work for devolution of powers and decentralization of authority.

Everyone likewise talks of corruption. An effective machinery must be created to deal with this monster.

Likewise with legal reform. The present law and legal procedure are too complicated, dilatory and costly. There is practically no justice for the common man today. The lower law courts have become a breeding and training ground for lying, deceit, forgery, perjury and worse.

I do not suggest that we have cut-and-dried solutions for all these things or that our solutions are the best. But we must make a determined effort at the highest levels to cure these ills.

You will find that we have suggested nationalisation in two spheres: (a) Banking and Insurance, (b) Mining. You had told me that while you considered it unnecessary to nationalise everything, the State must occupy the strategic points in the economy. We consider that one of the most strategic points is Banking and Insurance. Asoka¹ told me that Mr. Deshmukh² himself was thinking somewhat on these lines.

As regards mining, the case for its nationalisation is unanswerable. The usual arguments against nationalisation do not apply here. The mines are already national property. Maladministration in the grant of leases and licences and the wasteful operation of the small operators have brought about a chaotic condition, leading to destruction of mineral resources. British companies still hold a key position in respect of important minerals. The Coal Board, I understand, is virtually in the hands of Britishers. Export of strategic and industrial minerals earns for us about seventy crore rupees per year. By substituting finished or partially finished goods this sum can be multiplied several fold and will lead to direct development of major industries. River Valley Projects that lie in the mineral zones should be given responsibility of developing mineral industries. The minerals, power, and river valley development must be grouped together.

Let me take this opportunity to make a few remarks about what you said about the general question of nationalisation. You were of the view that it would do no harm if some industries were left in private hands, provided the mainsprings of economic policy and power were in the hands of the State and they were made to subserve the public good. I agree. But at present the mainsprings are in the hands of private enterprise and it is the State that subserves the interest of the former. This situation has to be reversed.

You had also spoken of the foolishness of buying junk and paying compensation. I agree. But if we have to buy junk why must we pay for it at any other rate than that of junk. There are also industries in which the capital invested has already been returned, such as the sugar industry. There is no reason for paying compensation in such cases. I think this whole question of

¹ Asoka Mehta, Socialist leader.

² C. D. Deshmukh, then Finance Minister of the Government of India.

nationalisation must be fully examined and not disposed of by a few arguments such as you gave.

To my mind equally important with nationalisation is the question of management of nationalised industries and State enterprises. The tendency of the State, in other words, of the Ministers and officers, is to concentrate all power in their hands in the name of efficiency. This cannot but be destructive of the values of socialism. The bureaucracy is not interested in those values, and nationalisation might merely end up in State capitalism, which is a horrible prospect. I should add that even from the point of view of production and efficiency, bureaucratisation of industry would be disastrous. Efficiency and production would both rise if the workers were made willing and equal partners in the enterprise.

This leads to the question of labour organisation. You may be surprised that we have included such a question in the draft programme. But we have done so because we believe that without a unified, responsible, democratic and effective trade union movement, industrial reconstruction of the type we envisage is impossible. We believe further that in our country such a movement can be built up only on the basis of what is called the *union shop*, i.e., one union in one industry, compulsory union membership for all employees, democratic functioning of the unions.

In the industrial development of the country small industries will play a predominant part. While everyone admits it no adequate policy or plan is forthcoming. The Five-Year Plan is very inadequate in this respect. Unless the fields of small and large scale industry are demarcated and the former protected from the competition of the latter, the talk of small industries would remain just talk.

I need hardly emphasise the case for State trading in strategic and important lines.

Our goal of economic equality must not remain a distant goal. We must here and now move towards it. Our land policy would to a very large extent establish equality in the countryside. But the inequalities in other spheres are even greater. A beginning there also must be made. And it must first of all be made in the sphere of Government. Everyone talks of austerity, but New Delhi is the last place in India where one can seek austerity.

There is no need to explain every item in the programme. I shall lastly mention the urgent need for integrated and far-reaching agrarian reform. This to my mind is the most urgent reform that is needed, and all our effort must be bent towards its accomplishment.

This in brief is my conception of the purposes and possibilities of our cooperation. If it be not also yours, I should respectfully urge that the whole idea be dropped. There would not be much harm done at this stage, and there would not be any misunderstanding or bitterness on our side. As there has been much public speculation over this subject, you might state at an appropriate occasion that you had certain talks with us regarding cooperation, but the talks did not reveal a common approach to the country's problems and so they were discontinued.

Yours affectionately,
Jayaprakash

DRAFT PROGRAMME

Constitutional Amendments :

1. Amendments to the Constitution

- (a) to remove obstacles in the way of social change ;
- (b) to abolish guarantees to Princes, civil servants, etc. ;
- (c) to abolish second chambers.

Administrative Reforms :

- 2. (a) Administrative reforms at all levels, including decentralization of political power and administrative authority ;
- (b) reform of law and legal procedure ;
- (c) summary and effective machinery to deal with corruption.
- 3. (a) Redrawing the administrative map of India on the basis of linguistic, economic and administrative considerations. Appointment of a Commission by the Parliament to work out the details on the basis of the above mentioned principles ;
- (b) Reduction of administrative costs by having regional (multi-state) Governors, High Courts, and other top level Tribunals and Public Service Commissions.

Redistribution of land :

4. (a) Redistribution of land to remove economic inequality and exploitation ; preference to be given in all such schemes to landless labour and poor peasants ;
 - (b) Immediate stoppage of all evictions ;
 - (c) Suitable legislation to prevent fragmentation and bring about consolidation of holdings ;
 - (d) Abolition of the remaining forms of landlordism ;
 - (e) Rural economy to be transformed into a cooperative economy through compulsory multi-purpose societies ;
 - (f) State assistance in providing credit and other facilities to agriculture ; such assistance to be given through multi-purpose societies ;
 - (g) The State, as far as possible, to deal not with individual peasants but through a group of them organised in a cooperative or panchayat. This should include collection of land-revenue, a part of which to remain with the village as organised in the multi-purpose society or panchayat.
5. Reclamation of wasteland and settlement of landless labour on them through village collectives. No wastelands to be allotted for capitalist farming.

Nationalisation, Cooperatives and Trade Unions :

6. Nationalisation of Banks and Insurance Companies ;
7. Progressive development of State Trading ;
8. Selected number of plants in different industries to be owned and run by the State or Cooperatives or autonomous corporations or workers' councils. Fostering organisations of technicians and managers to provide expert advice and administrative personnel for State enterprises ;
9. Unified trade union movement organised on the basis of the *union shop*. This will enable the unions to become socially responsible agencies ;
10. Nationalisation of coal and other mines producing important minerals ;
11. Association of workers in the management of State enterprises.

Small-Scale Industries :

12. Demarcation of spheres of large and small-scale industries, and establishing, encouraging and protecting small-scale industries.

Economic Equality :

13. As a first step towards achieving economic equality in the country higher salaries and emoluments in Government services shall be scaled down.

Swadeshi :

14. The spirit of Swadeshi to be promoted and made to pervade all walks of life.

PART TWO

SOCIALISM TO SARVODAYA

1951

9. Socialism and Sarvodaya*

TO most people Sarvodaya is some crankish creed which talks a good deal of non-violence and trusteeship, but is afraid to bring about any social change. To all serious minded persons, however, I would recommend a careful study of the Sarvodaya Plan. The Plan is no wishy-washy sentimentalism, but a concrete programme of basic social revolution. Outside of the conventional socialist circles, it is the first attempt to picture concretely a new social order. Socialists, particularly scientific socialists, who must be objective and take into account facts instead of preconceived notions, must view this attempt with sympathy and try to understand and draw near to a group of persons than whom no more devoted servants of the people can be found.

I am afraid even in the Socialist Party, which takes a scientific rather than a dogmatic view of theory, there is not sufficient awareness either of the importance of this group of workers or of the startlingly familiar conclusions to which they are arriving. Any one who cares to read the Sarvodaya Plan will find that it contains eighty per cent of the immediate programme of the Socialist Party, besides sharing the common ideal of a classless and casteless society.

It may be interesting to recall how the Sarvodaya Plan came into being. When Gandhiji was still alive, it had been decided, in view of the rapidly deteriorating situation in the country and the prevailing confusion in government policy, that the constructive workers should meet at Wardha towards the end of February 1948 and prepare a programme embodying the

* Article in *Janata*. Slightly condensed.

Gandhian principles of national reconstruction to be placed before the country and the Government. Mahatmaji was himself to guide this meeting, but history willed otherwise. Later, however, the contemplated meeting was held and finally in December 1949 two hundred constructive workers met at Wardha and endorsed the programme which was published on 30th January 1950 as the Sarvodaya Plan.

This is not the place to describe the Plan in full, but let me set forth its basic points. The ideal that the Plan sets out to achieve is that of a non-violent, non-exploitative co-operative society which shall not be based on caste or class and in which there shall be equal opportunity for all. The present competitive economy shall be replaced by a social economy based on co-operation. Proprietorship in agricultural land shall vest in the tiller of the soil under regulations laid down by society. There shall be redistribution of land and no one shall have more land than three times the economic holding. The uneconomic holdings shall be pooled into co-operative farms. There shall be collective farming on wastelands brought under cultivation. Farmers carrying on cultivation on individual farms shall have to function through the village multi-purpose society. At present price levels, rupees one hundred per month should be the lowest wage or income, and twenty times that amount, i.e. two thousand rupees per month, should be the highest wage or income.

The Plan divides industry into centralised and decentralised. To quote: "Centralised industries should be owned by society and run by autonomous corporations or by co-operatives if possible." Then the Plan makes the following striking statement: "Such centralised industries should be socialised on payment of compensation calculated on the basis of the ceiling allowed under the scheme (i.e. rupees two thousand per month) and which should be only a rehabilitation compensation."

In the public owned centralised industries the employees will also be associated with the management. Foreign concerns should either go out of existence or pass under public ownership. In decentralised industries the instruments of production will be owned either individually or co-operatively. The foreign trade of the country should be placed under the control of a public corporation.

With regard to Banking and Insurance "the minimum programme should be to organise mass saving and control of investments in the interest of agriculture and decentralised industries and ultimately to socialise Banks and Insurance companies to save the national economy from the vicious monopoly of high finance."

Regarding taxation "our aim should be to evolve a financial system under which fifty per cent of the public revenues collected may be spent by the village panchayats. From the remaining fifty per cent the administration of the higher bodies should be financed."

This should give an idea of the nature of the Sarvodaya Plan. It would be worth anyone's while to study the entire Plan. Whoever does so with an open mind would agree with me that if this Plan were implemented, it would take us a very long way indeed towards socialism.

The next step would then be easy. It may be asked what then is the need for a Socialist Party if the Sarvodaya Plan itself is sufficient? The answer of this too will be found by those who care to read the Plan. The authors of the Plan are not politicians and they have no political party of their own. As they say in their note they have merely tried to place before the country a Gandhian programme of national reconstruction. But they are aware that they have no instrument through which to implement the Plan. No doubt they still hoped in January 1950 to persuade the Congress to implement it. But that hope must have faded away by now; and there is no reason to suppose that if the Socialist Party gives promise to implement the Plan, the Gandhian constructive workers would refuse to co-operate. Indeed I have been feeling for some time that the constructive workers and the Socialist Party must join hands to create a new social order. I wish members of the Socialist Party had the intellectual honesty to study objective facts and refuse to be swayed by prejudice.

Let me hasten to add that Socialism is not just the Sarvodaya Plan. It is much more. But then there is no reason to suppose that the further contents of Socialism would be unacceptable to the constructive workers, or that the Sarvodaya Plan is the last word by them on the task of creating a new civilisation.

A word now about Gandhism and Socialism. I have been reported as having said in Gujarat [1951] that Gandhism was Socialism. I never made any such statement. I should, however, like to state now as emphatically as I can that Socialism in this country would neglect Gandhism at its peril. The conventional attitude of the 'scientific socialist' is to brush Gandhiji aside as a crankish old man who was so much out of date in this atomic age, who was medieval, reactionary and even an indirect apologist of the vested interests. The more sophisticated among them go forward and poke fun at his theory of trusteeship and sum him up as a class collaborationist. The trouble is that the so-called scientific socialist is seldom scientific. More often than not he is just a bigoted phrase-monger.

Far from being reactionary, Gandhiji was a social revolutionary of an exceptionally original kind, and he has made contributions to social thought and the methodology of social change that constitute imperishable contributions to human progress and civilisation.

The first aspect of Gandhism that must interest the socialist is its moral or ethical basis, its insistence on values. Russian or Stalinist interpretation of socialist philosophy has reduced it to a crass Machiavellian code of conduct utterly devoid of any sense of right or wrong, good or evil. The end justifies the means; and when the end is power—personal and group power—there is no limit to the depths to which the means will sink to secure the objective. The struggle for power in every communist country—not against the old order but amongst communist power-seekers themselves—has led to a totalitarian society which is so different from what was proclaimed by the fathers of Socialism as the goal of the social revolution. To the horrors of this unscrupulous, amoral, political philosophy Gandhism offers a corrective that socialists would overlook only at the cost of the very substance of their creed. The values of individual and social life that Socialism strives to achieve and make the basis of new civilisation also constitute the foundation stone of a Gandhian society. It is true that philosophically Gandhism has a non-secular and religious or super-natural foundation, whereas socialist philosophy is wholly secular and natural or material. But translated in terms of the practices of life, the values are not different: social and economic equality (casteless and classless society);

freedom from exploitation ; fullest possible freedom and opportunity for self-development ; dignity of the human personality ; cooperation ; society's responsibility for the well-being of each ; and the responsibility of each towards society.

The second aspect of Gandhism that must attract every socialist is its undying contribution to revolutionary technology. Till before Gandhiji the only means that the suppressed and exploited had with which to fight against their oppressor were violent means. The peaceful means of struggle were limited to agitation, and, in the case of industrial labour, to strike and general strike. Beyond those limits the struggle was powerless to go. Violent means were not always available nor advisable. Therefore the struggle for social justice was unable to express itself adequately. In Mahatma Gandhi's method of civil disobedience and satyagraha, the suppressed and exploited have found a new technique that carries the struggle forward beyond the usual peaceful limits and gives full expression to the urge for social justice and social change.

A third aspect of Gandhism is the insistence on decentralisation—economic and political. Ordinarily, in leftist circles this is characterised as antediluvian. But those socialists who do not equate their own power with a workers' democracy, who are aware of the disastrous consequences of centralisation of economic and political power must carefully and sympathetically consider this aspect of Gandhism. Economic decentralisation does not necessarily mean rejection of modern science and technology ; though it does mean that the modern techniques of production are neither used as a means of exploitation, nor as a means of domination, of man by man. The need of decentralised industry in a backward economy like India's, where production must be labour-intensive instead of capital-intensive, further underlines the nearness of Gandhian thought on this matter with socialist reconstruction in India. Political decentralisation neither means a weak State nor absence of planned life. The actual forms of economic and political decentralisation suited to the needs of a Socialist society have to be studied and evolved. In this task the Gandhian constructive workers have a vital role to play.

I have selected just these three issues to illustrate my view that Socialism will neglect Gandhism at its peril. There are many more problems of social revolution and of social

reconstruction on which Gandhism has some definite contribution to make. And my plea is that it is the duty of every scientific socialist, as distinguished from the dogmatist, to understand Gandhism and assimilate as much of it as found desirable in order to establish Socialism.

1952

10. Materialism and Goodness*

IN days gone by men tried to be good, impelled by some higher moral force in which they believed; and goodness meant such things as truthfulness, honesty, kindness, chastity, unselfishness. Men felt that it was the highest moral duty to try to be good. Whether they succeeded in their trial, or whether they tried at all, was a different matter. The important point is that society provided every individual with the motive to be good: it was the command of religion, of God; it was necessary for one's highest growth, for self-realization; it brought peace and supreme happiness; it brought salvation and freedom from births and deaths.

In the present society, with the hold of religion gone, faith in God shaken, moral values discarded as dead-weights of the dark ages of history, in short with materialism enthroned in men's hearts, are there any incentives to goodness left? Indeed, has the question any relevance at all to present facts, problems and ideals of human society?

I hold emphatically that no other question is more relevant to us today.

In spite of what may be broadly described as the materialist climate of the present society, men everywhere are engaged, in their different ways, in creating a heaven upon earth—in remaking, refining, perfecting human society. These efforts, even the most idealistic and ambitious, such as communism of its original conception, seem, however, to be shipwrecking on one obdurate rock—human baseness. It is clearer today than ever that social reconstruction is impossible without human reconstruction.

* Article in *Freedom First*, entitled "Incentives to Goodness."

Society cannot be good unless individual men are good, and particularly those men who form the *elite* of society.

Here then is the crux of the modern problem. Men wish to create, if not an ideal, at least a good society. Modern science and technology make that task far easier than ever before. But men lack the tools with which to make themselves. And the ideas are forgotten, and they begin to fight for power, position, spoils, bringing down the whole edifice of the new society.

Therefore, the problem of human goodness is of supreme moment today. The individual asks today why he should be good. There is no God, no soul, no morality, no life hereafter, no cycle of birth and death. He is merely an organisation of matter, fortuitously brought into being, and destined soon to dissolve into the infinite ocean of matter. He sees all round him evil succeed—corruption, profiteering, lying, deception, cruelty, power politics, violence. He asks naturally why he should be virtuous. Our social forms of today and the materialist philosophy which rules the affairs of men answer back: he need not. The cleverer he is, the more gifted, the more courageously he practises the new amorality; and in the coils of this amorality the dreams and aspirations of mankind become warped and twisted.

For many years I have worshipped at the shrine of the goddess—Dialectical Materialism—which seemed to me intellectually more satisfying than any other philosophy. But while the main quest of philosophy remains unsatisfied, it has become patent to me that materialism of any sort robs man of the means to become truly human. In a material civilization man has no rational incentive to be good. It may be that in the kingdom of dialectical materialism fear makes men conform and the Party takes the place of God. But when that God himself turns vicious, to be vicious becomes an universal code.

I feel convinced, therefore, that man must go beyond the material to find the incentives to goodness. As a corollary, I feel further that the task of social reconstruction cannot succeed under the inspiration of a materialist philosophy.

It may be asked if any social conditioning is at all necessary for men to acquire goodness. Is not man essentially good? Are not most men in every society decent?

Yes and no.

Man is a socio-organic being: he is partly the product of nature and partly that of society. What man is by nature cannot be said with certainty. Indeed, the very concepts of good and bad are supernatural or super-organic. There is nothing good or bad in nature. Human nature, apart from the instincts of self and race preservation, is most likely of a neutral character which acquires moral tones in accordance with social conditioning.

It is true that in every society most men are decent and good. These men go through life without being called upon to make any vital moral judgments. Their routine of life runs within narrow circles, and custom and tradition answer for them the questions concerning right or wrong.

But firstly, these harmless decent men are apt under social stimuli to turn suddenly wild and vicious. Decent Hindus and Muslims, living peaceably together, did not hesitate, as we know to our cost, to fly at each other's throats when the social passions were aroused.

Secondly, what is vital for the character of society, and for the direction of its growth, is not so much the character of the inert mass as that of the elite. It is the philosophy and action of this group of the select that determine the destinies of men. To the extent the elite become godless or amoral, to that extent evil overtakes the human race.

Let me hasten to remove a possible misunderstanding. I do not mean to suggest that all those who profess a philosophy of materialism are vicious nor that all non-materialists are good. But what I do assert is that there is no logic in materialism for the individual to endeavour deliberately to acquire and practise goodness. On the other hand, those who go beyond matter will find it difficult to justify non-good.

Non-materialism—I am using this negative phrase because I have no particular school in mind—by rejecting matter as the ultimate reality immediately elevates the individual to a moral plane, and urges him, without reference to any objective outside of himself, to endeavour to realise his own true nature and fulfil the purpose of his being. This endeavour becomes the powerful motive force that drives him in its natural course to the good and the true. It will be seen as an important corollary of this that only when materialism is transcended does individual man come into his own and become an end in himself.

1953

11. The Ideological Problems of Socialism*

I should like to start by saying that socialism is ninety per cent practice and ten per cent theory. I am afraid socialists are often inclined to forget this rather simple axiom. If we always remember that after all the test of theory is in practice, there would not be in the socialist movement so much controversy, so much hair-splitting. Practice and theory must obviously be interrelated, for, as I have said, the test of every theory must lie in the practice. If we look at the ideological problems of socialism from this point of view, we will also have to examine the practical tasks which are facing the socialists throughout the world. The field is too wide to be covered in a short address. I shall, therefore, confine myself to a few problems which have arisen out of certain practical, objective situations.

I propose to deal only with five such problems, the first of which is the problem of socialist axioms. I have placed this problem in the first place, because I am convinced that unless a solution is found to this problem, all our attempts at socialist reconstruction of society are bound to fail. How has this problem arisen? It has arisen in many ways, but let me point out only two sources from which it has appeared. We have before us the very vast experiment of socialist building in the U.S.S.R. It was assumed, I believe, by the architects of socialism in Russia that if they proceeded with certain changes in the society, in the social environment, in the foundation of the social structure and in the structure itself, it would be possible for them to build up

* Address to the First Asian Socialist Conference held at Rangoon.

a socialist society of which they had dreamed for years and for which they had struggled through perhaps an equal number of years. But while we find that the economic basis of socialist society has been laid down: industry has been nationalised, agriculture has been collectivised, the motive of private profit has been removed from the economic system, the social structure or superstructure that has been built up on this foundation does not answer to the description of socialism. I doubt whether there would be any delegate or any comrade here who would describe the society in Soviet Russia as a socialist society. He would perhaps describe it more as state capitalism than socialism.

Now, there must be certain reasons why all these things happen. If you go back to the ideological formulations of Marx, if you go back to dialectical or historical materialism, as it is called, for an answer, I am afraid you will be disappointed. The means of production are supposed to govern the relations of production, and the changes in the means of production are supposed to govern the changes in the relations of production. You have, as far as the productive technique is concerned, a highly industrialised technique based on electricity and large machines. You have mechanisation of agriculture. You have a technique, which looked at purely from the technical point of view, is not different from the technique of production found in the U.S.A.; but whereas that technique in the U.S.A. gives you a capitalist society, in Soviet Russia it gives you an entirely different system. Therefore, you will have to go deeper into the problem.

Let me also at this stage point out that as far as the old ideological formulations are concerned, somehow their development has been arrested. The interpretation of history which was started by Marx, I am afraid, has more or less stayed at the stage where Marx had brought it. It was hoped that after the socialist government had been established in such a large country as Russia, we would have further development of the science of socialism, of its philosophy, of its historical interpretation and so on, but we find that in Russia instead of interpreting history, they are busy distorting history: and if you start distorting history, you cannot interpret history. If you begin to deny facts, historical facts, if you shut your eyes to even those that have taken place, there cannot be any scientific interpretation. However, this was by way of digression.

Going back to Russia, we find that after the achievement of power there began a very bitter struggle for power inside the ruling party itself. That struggle for power knew absolutely no bounds. Every means was used in that game of power. We have found a repetition of the same process in other countries which have come under the domination of Stalinist communism. We had for instance the recent trials in Czechoslovakia and the execution of Slanski and the rest of them. Now, here you are faced with a very serious problem. A party comes to power. It starts with very noble ideals. It aims at the creation, ultimately, of a society in which even the State has ceased to exist; there are no classes, there is no money, no wages—that is the ultimate picture of communist society which the Communist Party of Soviet Russia always had before it. But in the achievement of that objective they failed dismally. And you may have found that they are now claiming in Soviet Russia to have more or less completed the socialist stage of their task. They claim that they are now beginning with the building up of a communist society, that is, a society in which there will not be institutions, social and economic, which I have just referred to.

Every socialist party throughout the world must be constantly aware of this serious problem of the demoralisation of the party and the corruption of the ideals in the midst of this struggle for power, and answers will have to be found for this very serious problem. I am afraid that the commonly accepted philosophy of Marxism, a philosophy accepted by many socialists, including the Stalinists, is based on amoralism, a philosophy that does not take into account the question of good or evil, a philosophy that regards this question as relative and relative to such an extent that these considerations can completely be disregarded, if the immediate purpose were to be served in that manner. There is another source from which this problem arises and that is a universal source, that is, the weakness of human nature, the weakness of individual man everywhere, his ambition, his selfishness, his stupidity, his hate, his fear. Now, if you are engaged only in shaping the environment in which the individual man lives—the social, economic and political environment—and if you are neglecting the individual, I am sure you will find that all these elements that go to constitute the nature of man as he

is today will vitiate all your efforts, all your attempts at social reconstruction.

We have in history attempts made to improve the individual by forgetting the environment in which the individual lives. For instance, we had Buddha. Looking at the problem of human misery and arriving at the conclusion that human misery can be traced to human desire, he developed a system of self-culture, a system for the culture of the individual, for the making, moulding and shaping of individual human nature so that he may be free from misery by controlling his passion, his desire. That was a very noble effort, but it was, if you forgive me for so saying, a one-sided effort. Today many socialists are again making the mistake of making another one-sided effort, namely, that of changing society alone and forgetting the individual. When Lord Buddha said that misery came from desire, he did not consider the misery that was the product of social institutions, of social environment. Supposing there are two babies born in this world, one in a very poor home, the other in a very wealthy home. The miseries of these two human personalities would not depend merely on their own nature, but also on their social circumstances. Similarly today, as I have already told you, if we merely create a socialist environment and leave the question of the individual alone, we will again find that it is a very partial effort at constructing a new social order, because the same individual will be functioning in that social environment and, if he is not a disciplined individual, if he is not an individual who is in tune with the aims of that society, who has not been trained, who has not learned to subdue and subjugate his personal desires and ambitions to the social good, we will find that the experiment of social engineering would miscarry.

I therefore place this before you as one of the fundamental problems of the socialist movement today. We are seeing before us experiments that are being shipwrecked on the question of amorality. Therefore I hope you will agree with me that whatever be our conception of the path to socialism, whatever be our interpretation of theories,* we in the socialist movement must subscribe to certain values, values which we will not consider relative in the sense that we could sacrifice them in order to achieve an immediate end. The communist started with this noble idea of a new society, a classless, stateless society, a

society of free and equal individuals, but he believed that no matter what he did today, no matter what were the means that he employed today, as long as he was successful he would ultimately arrive at these goals. So we see that his objective is noble but instead of progressing towards it he has been going astray. He has taken a different path which will never take him to the goal of communism, and therefore, if I may refer to a very brilliant thesis of my friend Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, we should in our movement apply what he calls the test of immediacy, that is, we must see that what we are doing immediately squares up with what we intend to do in the ultimate stage. If our present action is in consonance with the ideals that we have before us, there is no reason to doubt where we would ultimately land ourselves. For there is some rational ground for assuming that if our present action squares up with the noble ideals that we have before us, then ultimately it is bound to take us there. If on the other hand we indulge in activities which contradict these ideals, these values, on which the new society will ultimately be based, if our present values contradict ultimate values, there is no rational ground for supposing that we will by some dialectical contrivance ultimately arrive at that goal. Therefore, friends, I should emphasise that the socialist movement along with the economic and political and social programmes must also have a programme which includes this question of values.

II

I should now turn to the next problem which I wish to place before you, that is the problem of creating a proper political framework for the development of a socialist society. Here, I am afraid, we are still groping. Various experiments have been made. If you go back to the classics of socialism, you will not get much light, because neither Marx nor Engels, nor Kautsky nor Lenin, described in detail the political characteristics of a socialist society. Marx and Engels, as you know, were mostly concerned with analysing the capitalist society and finding out the dynamic of that society which would help the socialists to create out of capitalism a socialist society. Now as far as the political expressions of socialism are concerned, the first one that, historically speaking, arose was the Russian political system. The Russian political system, as you know, has gone through a long process

of evolution. Some of us believe that if the original concept of the political structure had been adhered to then, possibly, Russia would not have socialism or communism, but it would also have not landed itself in the morass in which it finds itself today. We have today there a structure which is a one party dictatorship. At the same time we have there a party which has a restricted membership, which goes periodically through purges, a party in which democracy does not seem to exist any longer; and in this one party dictatorship we have a completely bureaucratic State, which cannot in any way be described as a worker's State, as a people's State. Obviously for the socialist movement of the world the Russian picture of political organisation would be found wanting and unacceptable. We would have to devise a different structure.

We have in certain Western countries such as Sweden or Finland, socialist governments trying to build up a socialist society. This task in these countries is being fulfilled within the framework of formal parliamentary democracy. It is possible in such countries, as it happened in Great Britain, for instance, that the socialist party should come to power for a number of years and then again lose that power as a result of the popular vote. To many socialists in Asia, and I have heard it being discussed in socialist circles, this would be a failure of socialism. Obviously those who consider this to be a failure of socialism believe that once a socialist party comes to power, every attempt should be made by that party by whatever means possible not to let that power slip out of its hands. Well, obviously that cannot happen within the confines of formal political democracy; there socialist reconstruction will have to take chances. It may be that in course of time socialism comes to be so entrenched in the heart of the people that the socialist party is perpetually in power and has got unrivalled opportunities for socialist reconstruction. Then in that country the question would arise whether the political structure that was evolved through the age of bourgeois liberalism should be preserved or there should be drastic changes made. I believe it is felt in this country also that representative government is not enough, that it is necessary in the political sphere as well as in the economic sphere to give power of self-government to the people at large. I think socialists in the West too are becoming aware of the problem of decentralisation of

political power, so that the people themselves may participate in the management of their affairs. It is not enough for a socialist parliament through a socialist cabinet to rule over a country, it must be supplemented by the people's participation at the lower levels of the administration also. Socialism today has to give the answer to the question whether even in those countries which have a tradition of democratic, representative government, the political structure of socialist society should be the same as it is now. Would it be enough if the economy of the country has been socialised? Would it be enough if a socialist party has come to power, if all these conditions have been fulfilled? Would we be satisfied or would we have to go forward and evolve a technique of political living and government in consonance with the ideals of socialism?

We have another example of a socialist political system that is in the process of evolution. It is very rapidly evolving and it is difficult for anyone to say at any period of time whether he is up-to-date with the developments that are taking place. I refer you to Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia is a country which till recently was ruled by the Communist Party. Yugoslavia too was and to a very large extent is today a one party state. But the Yugoslav Communists are anxious to bring to an end as speedily as possible this one party rule; and I hope you are aware of some of the most unorthodox steps that these Communists of Yugoslavia have taken. When I say unorthodox I have in mind the orthodoxy that is preached and practised at Moscow. Somehow or other they claim to be the true interpreters of Marxism-Leninism which some of us, I am sure, would question. It is an axiom with all of us that socialism cannot exist without democracy, nor democracy be complete without socialism. The Yugoslav Communists are aware of this axiom of socialism which, I may say, is also the axiom of Marxism as I understand it. Being aware of this axiom the Yugoslav Communist Party has decided that it is for the people themselves to rule over themselves through Peoples' Committees, Workers' Councils, and the representative institutions of the peasants. It should be these that should come forward and take the responsibility of administering the country, and therefore they are bringing to the forefront what was known as people's front and which they have now renamed as the Socialist Alliance of the working people

of Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav friends believe that in a society in which socialism has universally been accepted as the goal, the responsibility of ruling should be given to the people. They believe that a multi-party system does not answer to the needs of socialist politics, and that the problem is to create a new political framework for socialist society. According to them once the goal of socialism has been popularly accepted, there is no need even for one party, much less many parties. Instead of a multi-party State, they are driving at a no-party State. That is a problem which all of us must seriously consider, namely, creation of a no-party State. That is why they have converted the Communist Party of Yugoslavia into the League of Communists which is going to perform the functions of political education, and all education in general, civic education included. I am sure they are going to give their attention to the education of the individual also. I do not know what will be the outcome of this development, but it is a very interesting development. If the State is to melt away, to whither away, the party must also wither away. The aims of the party should become so broadcast, so popularised, so universally accepted that the party becomes superfluous.

Now, I have my reservations about this development. It seems to me that if in a particular society at a particular period of time certain aims are universally accepted, it does not mean that there should necessarily be a single party in existence. For instance, in the age of liberalism, in the age in which capitalism was performing a revolutionary function and playing a progressive role in Europe, the ideals of free enterprise and of individual liberty as conceived by liberal capitalism were commonly accepted by the people; nevertheless we had in these countries different parties owing allegiance to capitalism and still functioning in opposition to one another. The Conservative Party of Great Britain and the Liberal Party of Great Britain have accepted the foundations of capitalist society and still there are two parties. In America you have the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. Both believe in free enterprise. Both accept the ideals of capitalist society and yet you have these two different parties. So I am not quite sure that when socialism comes to be generally accepted by most of the people there should be or there would be only a single party in existence. Socialists themselves might differ

as to how to carry on their task from day to day and those differences might lead to the formation of different socialist parties. Therefore I am not quite convinced that at least at this stage it would be possible to do away with the multiplicity of parties. Some of us may not be very happy at the multiplication of socialism and multiplicity of parties in the world, but we have to adjust ourselves to the needs of the situation. It seems to me that the Yugoslav Communists are trying to create a democracy within a one party dictatorship and therefore, perhaps, it is possible for them to go forward in the manner in which they are doing. But if we were functioning under democratic conditions and through the vote of the people a socialist party comes to power it cannot wish all the parties off the map, as it were. It will have to reckon with them if it does not wish to give up its faith in democracy, its faith in socialism itself.

If we believe that socialism is for the good of the people, if we believe that only under socialism the people will come into their own, then there should be no reason for us to deny democracy, because only through democracy can we go to the people, and therefore if we come to power democratically it does not seem possible for you to do away with the multiplicity of parties and the multi-party system might remain a feature of socialist society. How permanent a feature, it is not possible for me to say now, but in the foreseeable future, I am quite sure, that in a democratic socialist set-up other parties, even other socialist parties, are bound to exist. The socialist parties might act concertedly up to a point, but they may have their differences also. Now, whether there is this no party structure, or whether there is a multi-party structure, that fundamental problem of the self-government of the people is always before you. All of us are apt to talk about the common man, but when we think of socialist reconstruction we think of ourselves. When we come to power we will do this, that and other things, and we will do it, if necessary, by force. But if we were to give the common people a place that is rightfully theirs in the political system, I am quite sure that you will have to evolve a decentralised State. I need not go into all the details of this question, but I should like you to keep it in view as the only possible means of translating socialism into people's rule at the lowest level.

III

The third problem is an allied problem, and that is the problem of the economic structure that would be necessary for a socialist society. Now according to Marxism, step by step as you go to examine the superstructure you begin with the means of production, relations of production, the relations of production determining the economic structure. If in Russia we do not have socialism but some kind of state capitalism, there must be something wrong vitally with the economic structure also. All of us know what is wrong with the economic system there. Centralisation, bureaucratisation, lack of industrial democracy, lack of workers' participation in the management of industry, in short, lack of popular control over the economic processes. We are apt to take over these ideals from Russia, the economic pattern that exists in Russia, in the hope of avoiding the defects that have grown out of it in Russia and grafting on it a democratic, decentralised political superstructure. Now one of the most important items of the economic programme of socialism is nationalisation of industries. Well, the industries in Soviet Russia have been nationalised, but they have not produced socialism; they have produced something else. Therefore there must be something wrong in this system of nationalisation, in this system of the management of nationalised industries. I do not know if in all the Asian countries the transport system has been nationalised, but speaking for India let me give you one example. In India our railways are a nationalised concern. They are not owned by private companies but by the State. We have a Railway Board which administers the railways and the railway administration is responsible to parliament. Now, supposing in India all the other industries or big industries were nationalised and we had the same kind of administrative structure to run these industries as we have for the railways, then, even after complete nationalisation, there will be no socialism. There would be bureaucratism, there would be exploitation, there would be no equal distribution of surplus value, as is the case with the railway system in India. The only difference between privately-managed railways and these State managed railways is that whereas in the former there used to be a management board responsible to the shareholders, here you have a management board officered by the bureaucracy

and responsible to the central government. The railwaymen have no voice from bottom upwards to the level of the railway board. They have no voice in the running of the railways. The wage structure is an entirely capitalist structure where the difference between the lowest wage and the highest wage is so great that we cannot imagine that difference being excelled even in a capitalist system. Now, we know that in Russia in the economic sphere these defects do exist. There is no hand either of the consumer or of the producer in the management and control of industry and in the distribution of profits. It is the bureaucracy, the hierarchy of the party, of industry, of army, of collectivised agriculture that decides this question. Therefore, we in the socialist movement must think concretely of steps that will eliminate bureaucracism and centralism, give to the producer and to the consumer a hand in the management, and also ensure that the fruits of labour are equitably distributed. We will have to give our attention to this problem.

I believe that one solution of this problem would be the dispersal of the ownership at different levels, instead of concentrated ownership in the hands of the central government—dispersed ownership at various levels down to the cooperative, down to the village organisation or municipal corporation. That would be one way of ensuring that too much economic power is not concentrated in too few hands, and we do not have an economic dictatorship along with the political dictatorship. We in Asia must also be conscious of our other limitations and in the light of those limitations approach this problem of economic structure. In most countries of Asia we have very meagre capital resources. The rate of capital formation is very slow because productivity is very low, even though the rate of consumption is low. The level of consumption is very low although the rate of saving is insignificant. Now, if we were to build up our economy under a dictatorship, it would be possible for that dictatorship to extract as much surplus value as possible from the producer, from the primary producer. Take the peasants, for instance. For industrialisation you require raw materials and food grains. Now whatever is available of these is not enough, because they have also to serve the individual needs of the primary producers, as well as the needs of socialist reconstruction. Now supposing we have a dictatorship, under that dictatorship it may be possible

for the State to expropriate the produce of the peasant and let him starve. It would be possible to engineer a famine and blame the starvation on the famine; and with your censorship and your propaganda you can always make it out that it is not a State-made famine, but it is due to the nefarious activities of the foreign agent and various other circumstances, and in this manner, if over a period of time you went on forcing the people to deny themselves, to deny their present needs, you could possibly industrialise at a rapid rate and on a large-scale. Even then your limitations will not leave you, but if you function democratically and if you rely on the votes of the peasantry, on the votes of the workers, it will not be possible for you to go beyond certain limits in trying to force the savings necessary for economic development. Therefore, the structure of socialist economy in most of the Asian countries is necessarily going to be a dispersed structure, a structure based not on concentrated, mass producing manufacture but on dispersed, decentralised manufacture beginning with the homes of the producers to small townships etc.; that again gives you a guarantee that economic power will not be concentrated in the hands of a small number of people, that you will be saved from economic dictatorship. Decentralisation would more or less arise out of the limitations of the situation in which you find yourselves.

In connection with this problem of economic structure we will have also to take into account the relationship of socialism to the worker, to the peasant, to the trade unions and the peasant unions and so on. In Russia the unions of the workers, as you know, are merely to perform the function of what the Americans have called 'papboys', that is, to goad the people to produce more, to work harder. Now we have to consider, in a socialist society, the relationship of the party, of the State to the peasants and to the workers. We have in Asia trade union movements of sorts largely manned at the managerial level and at the level of leadership by middle class people. In that sense it is not a genuine trade union movement which draws up leaders from its ranks and grows up as a result of the efforts of that leadership. The relationship of such trade unions to political parties is a very vexed question throughout Asia. There are many trade unions and there are many socialist parties or leftist parties or Marxist parties, and there is a race between them, for the soul of the

workers. But I should like to emphasise, as one of the fundamental ideological problems of socialism, at least in the East, that if we rely here on the working class and on the trade union movement to the same extent to which socialists in the West do, we will find that we will never be able to establish socialism. In the East it is not possible only with the support of the working class to establish socialism. It will become possible only if we have the support of the peasantry. If you wish to have the support of the peasantry, naturally you must satisfy their elemental urges. You have to give them land by abolishing feudalism and re-distributing the land holdings. Now if you go about re-distributing the land, what you do is to create a new class of proprietary owners, peasant proprietors. These millions of peasant proprietors are your constituencies, the constituencies of the socialist movement in the East. You must get their support in whatever you are trying to do; whether it is an armed insurrection you are engineering or whether it is an election you are fighting, you must have the support of this peasant mass. If we understand this fully, then our conception of the economic organisation of socialist society is bound to be drastically different from what it is elsewhere.

Many socialists, I am afraid, talk to the peasants with their tongue in the cheek. They think the peasant is a fool and we would cheat him, in the first instance, by giving him land and thus get his support, and after we have got his support we will deal with him properly and put him in his right place, expropriate him again and bring him into our collective farms. I shall very humbly beg to submit that if we follow that course of action, whatever we may be able to achieve, we will not achieve socialism. It may be a new pattern of dictatorship, but it will certainly not be socialism. Therefore you have to take the peasant with his small holding, living in his village, very emotionally attached to that plot of land which belongs to him, and yet make him a socialist and create a socialist society in which he plays his part. I do not know the rural community in the rest of Asia, but in India we have villages, hundreds and thousands of villages. I believe that in a country like India the objective should be to pool their holdings, so that we might have, instead of collectivisation or nationalisation what I should call villagisation of land: an economic structure which seems to me to be

ideally suited to the rural community and in which the ownership of the land is transferred to the village community, not to an abstract entity known as the State or the nation, but to the concrete entity with which the peasant is acquainted and of which he is a part. Collectivisation in Soviet Russia has become a tool in the hands of the bureaucracy for exploiting the peasants. I am sure that you are aware that the rulers of Russia were not satisfied even with this weapon that they have in their hands of ruling over the peasantry through the collectivised farm, and therefore a proposal was made which has presently been given up but may be revived again, a proposal to create what was called 'aggregare', agricultural cities into which collectivised farms—five, six or a dozen of them—were to be amalgamated and the population of the villages were to be shifted to a town, so that the intimate human and personal relationship that exists in a village might cease and an impersonal relationship of a town come to take its place, so that it could become easy for the party bureaucrat to rule over the peasants who become workers of the 'aggregare' or agricultural factories, if you wish to call them so. That is the course of development that naturally comes out of the Russian system.

IV

Having dealt with the economic structure that we need to fashion in order to sustain a decentralised political system, I shall now refer to two other problems and close my remarks. The technique of struggle is also a part of the socialist ideology and there is a great deal of controversy in the ranks of socialism on this question. I hope that all of you will agree that if we are going to establish a democratic society, we should follow the democratic means, of course, if those means are available to us. But democratic means are not always available. They are not available in dictatorships. They are not available in a country where there is a civil war going on. However, if democratic opportunities do exist, it should be our concern to see that we function democratically. We have at the back of our mind, many of us, a lurking suspicion that democratic methods might take us forward to a certain extent, but at the last stage violence will be necessary, that without violence the socialist revolution would not be complete. Friends I wish most earnestly to impress upon

you the wrong assumptions on which this belief, that in the ultimate stage violence would be necessary, is founded. For the Western socialists this is an axiomatic truth, but in Asia where we have been used to feudalism, imperialism, civil war, the idea that it is possible through democratic means to establish socialism appears to be a reformist proposition. When I speak of democratic methods, let me make it clear that I am not speaking only of parliamentary methods, of constitutional methods. I am also thinking in terms of vital, large, mass movements, mass action of a non-violent character, unconstitutional but at the same time peaceful. If we are working with the sanction of the people behind us, if we have achieved contact with the hearts of the people, if we have got their backing, there is no reason why it should not be possible for us to move the masses into such peaceful activity.

For instance, there is the problem of redistribution of land. The problem can be solved in three ways : by the socialist party coming to power and legislating in that behalf ; by a violent action by the peasantry or by the landless workers for the occupation of the land, that may or may not succeed ; by a peaceful mass action by the peasantry for the occupation of those lands. Where the socialists are in power, the other two questions do not arise ; but where they are not in power and where they have the opportunity to function democratically, where there are civil liberties, where there is scope for organisation and propaganda, there, if we are able to move hundreds and thousands of landless people and make them peacefully squat on the lands which are owned by landlords but which are tilled by the landless labourers and which should rightfully belong to them and thereby offer resistance to the powers that be, no matter whether there are arrests, baton charges and shootings, then there is reason to believe that no power would be able to overcome that force. Even violent action will not succeed unless it is a real mass action. The action of fully armed insurgents will not help the landless people in forcibly occupying the lands. There also has to be a mass movement which will end up in the revolutionary capture of power by the socialists. Now this technique of peaceful action was experimented upon in India by Mahatma Gandhi in the course of our national struggle. And it proved successful. I for one am convinced, that under proper conditions and under proper leadership, this technique can succeed in the matter of land and

social change also. Therefore, I do commend this technique of peaceful struggle against the State, the capitalists and other exploiters as a method of achieving socialism.

I should like to refer here to a very interesting movement that has been started in India recently. When the Socialist Party in India thought of redistribution of land, we thought of it in terms of a movement which I have just now explained to you. But now has come forward a great Indian, the foremost follower of Mahatma Gandhi, called Vinoba Bhave. His is an entirely new technique. He said "Yes, land must be redistributed, land must belong to the tiller, landlordism must go. But let us do this by the method of love." Now, this is not an Evangelist platform. I am aware that I am speaking from a socialist platform, but still I feel that this method is vital enough. Vinoba Bhave started going from village to village on foot and asking those who have land to give part of it for the benefit of those who do not. Just as simple as that; in fact so simple that it sounds non-sensical, foolish, but it seems to be working. We are all human beings, the landlord is a human being, the capitalist is a human being; there is something in all of us to which this man is appealing and there is good response: hundreds and thousands of acres of land have already been given to him. When he started this movement he was alone, assisted by a handful of *Ashramites*, inmates of the "Ashram" of Mahatma Gandhi. But now there are thousands of people who work with him. Many in the Indian Socialist Party are working under him, going from village to village, asking people to give away land for the benefit of the landless people, making a moral appeal to them, saying that no one should have exclusive rights in land. For land is not created by man. Every one who lives by land should have a share in it. As a result of this campaign a climate has been created practically in the whole country in favour of redistribution of land. Even those who were at one time opposed to this idea are coming round. They have begun to advocate redistribution of land as the immediate programme after which all other development projects can come or should come.

Now, I do not know why socialists in the world should close their eyes to a phenomenon of this kind, to this new approach to economic problems. As a matter of fact, I was very reluctant to come here, because I was in the midst of

this land gift movement, *Bhoodan* movement. I was also going from village to village and I intend, as soon as I return from Rangoon, to go back to this work in the state where Bhave is at present conducting this movement. Everyone who has land, big landlords, small landlords, everyone is now convinced that he will not be very long in possession of all the land that he owns today. Everyone is convinced that this movement has created a new climate, a new atmosphere. Those who do not have land, will have land given to them. The test of immediacy of which I spoke to you in a different context is somehow proving very useful here. And so in the next movement when we start an action of this nature people will be attracted because they get immediate benefits. Whatever happens happens immediately; you collect land, you collect 10,000 acres of land, 50,000 acres of land, 100,000 acres of land; you collect here and now and redistribute them. True, there are millions of people who are to be given land and by merely giving it to a few thousand people you do not solve the problem; but a hope is generated in the hearts of the people that something is going to be done here and now, that we shall have our rights fulfilled. That is the tremendous advantage in this type of movement. Even if you have a peaceful resistance movement for the occupation of land, it might end in absolute failure. Not an inch of land may come under the occupation of the squatters if the resistance is beaten down. But here that question does not arise and even if we have ultimately to go forward to that stage, the atmosphere, the consciousness, the hope and even the organisation required for getting response of that kind is thereby created. I do not know if a similar technique can be evolved in other spheres for the redistribution of capitalist wealth, for the peaceful transformation of the capitalist system. This technique did not come out of my head, but I had humility enough to accept it when I saw it work. Therefore, friends, I would submit that in the sphere of technique, as in other spheres, the last word has not been said. We are all going through the stage of experimentation and it is worthwhile that we experiment in this sphere of technique also.

V

Yet another question that confronts the socialist movement is the question of relationship between socialist countries. Marx

will not help us here nor will Lenin help us here, except in the sense of giving us general direction. Here also we have to go back to Soviet Russia. We find that when a number of communist States came into existence, the relationship of these States to Soviet Russia was not much different from the relationship of the metropolitan States to their colonial empire. The relation of Soviet Russia with Poland, or Hungary or Baltic States which have ceased to exist, or Yugoslavia was not based on the principle of equality and mutual aid. You are all aware of the main issue on which the break between Yugoslavia and Soviet Russia came about. It was this issue of what the relationship between Yugoslavia and Soviet Russia should be. "Are we equals," asked the Yugoslavs, "are we going to cooperate on the basis of equality? Or is Yugoslavia going to become an economic colony? Are the resources of Yugoslavia going to be used for the development of the Russian economy at the cost of the Yugoslav economy?" I think that the Yugoslav Communist Party has made a great contribution to socialist ideology by bringing this problem to the forefront and emphatically stating this principle of equality between socialist States. There are not enough socialist States established today for us to concretely discuss the issue but theoretically the issue has to be discussed, and I am sure that all of us will agree that no matter what the difference be in the development of the socialist countries, the relationship among them must be that of equality, of mutual aid.

As a matter of fact, if there is any tilting of the balance it should be in favour of backward and weaker countries and not in favour of the stronger and more developed ones as is unfortunately the case with the Communist bloc. If there is a highly developed country which has become socialist it should be its responsibility to remove the unbalance that exists in the world today. There are a few, as some one used the phrase, super-developed countries, some well developed countries, some backward countries, and just as it is the task of socialism in a given country to equalise opportunities within, to redistribute the wealth that has been produced, and the power, economic and political, that has been concentrated in the hands of a small class, likewise, in the international sphere, it should be the task of socialism to remove this discrepancy, to help, through some kind of world development

pool, world development organisation, raise the level of the backward countries. The domestic task should be extended to the foreign sphere. What we are trying to do in our own country we should try to do on the international level. This undoubtedly is a very difficult task. I have found that in our own country there are certain states which are, in the matter of food, surplus states, and some deficit. We have found it very difficult to persuade the surplus states to part with some of their food so that the deficit states might be able to feed themselves adequately. Even within a country this kind of provincial and regional selfishness exists, much so on the international plane; but if we were to keep this in mind and at least accept this as a basis and make an honest attempt to implement it, I am quite sure that the socialist movement which is represented here will give a new direction to the world socialist movement.

1953

12. A Plea for Gandhism*

IT is well-known that there are three ideological trends within the Praja Socialist Party today. One is that of the old Socialist Party, the other of Gandhism from the K.M.P.P.¹ and the third of Netaji² from the Forward Bloc. Since the organisational merger of the three parties, there has been a process of interchange of ideas. But a complete synthesis is yet to come. I believe that this synthesis, which is very essential, is possible only on the basis of Gandhism.

The old Socialist Party had started, it will be remembered, under a strong influence of Leninist Marxism. But it had slowly travelled towards Gandhism. It did so when it gave up its faith in dictatorship, even as a transitional phase; when it asserted that socialism could not exist without democracy; when it came to believe that decentralisation of economic and political power was essential for democracy; when it decided that good ends could not be achieved through evil means; when it accepted, at least in words, satyagraha as a revolutionary weapon.

The K.M.P.P. was Gandhian, at least its outstanding leaders such as Acharya J. B. Kripalani, Dr. P. C. Ghosh, Shri Kelappan were and are ideologically devout Gandhians.

Netaji had rejected Marxian materialism and stood for the spiritual values of life, which he wanted to make the foundation of the new social order. It was true that he was not averse to

* Article in the *Janata*.

¹ The Socialist Party had now become the Praja Socialist Party through merger with the Kisan Majdoor Praja Party (K.M.P.P.)

² A section of the Forward Bloc originally founded by Subhas Chandra Bose (popularly known as Netaji) had also joined it.

violence in certain contexts. But I have no doubt that he would have been the first to reject violence in the context of social and human reconstruction in a free India. Use of violence in such a context would have been destructive of the very spiritual values for which he stood.

In view of this situation a synthesis on the basis of Gandhism should be a natural development.

I am sure that some think that to mix Gandhism and Socialism is a sign of ideological confusion. I wish that such friends did some fresh thinking. Both socialism and communism are faced with failures. Communism, where it is victorious, has ended up in state capitalism and dictatorship—the very anti-thesis of communism. Socialism, in Western Europe at any rate, has lost its pristine idealism and has become only a parliamentary or legalistic creed. Thus, both the methods of violence and of parliamentary action have failed. Gandhism, to my mind, offers the third alternative—that of revolution by non-violent mass action.

We have a fine illustration of this in Vinoba's Bhoodan Movement. He eschews violence, but does not pin his faith on legislation. He wants to bring about redistribution of land by the action of the people. The law will come later to formalise what the people have already done. The common criticism of Bhoodan is that by "begging" for land the question could not be solved and that therefore land must be redistributed by law. The joke is that this is supposed to be a revolutionary view. It is little realised that a revolution cannot be made by law.

A real revolution is a revolution in the values of life. No law can effect a transvaluation of values. The transvaluation can be reflected in law once it has taken place in the life of the people. For this reason Vinoba, a true Gandhian, is not concerned with legislation. He wants the people themselves to redistribute the land. For this he and his co-workers are going about trying to change the minds or hearts. The question is raised about the time that such a revolution would take. The Gandhian revolution for national freedom did not take much time as compared with other national revolutions. The success Vinobaji has already achieved is unique in history. And 1957, the dead-line by which he wants to complete the task of redistribution, is not far away.

I am afraid most people in the P.S.P. are inclined to follow the Western method of establishing socialism by law. That is why there is so much concern with political action and the struggle for power. Most of us think that it is only when we capture power that we shall be able to build up socialism by legislation and State power. If we persist in this legalistic concept of the social revolution, I have no doubt we are going to suffer the same disillusionment as socialists in the West.

Gandhism does not concentrate on the capture of power of the State, but goes direct to the people and helps them to effect the revolution in their lives and, consequently, revolution in the life of the community. Support from the State power would be assured once the power of the people has been created.

It should be clear that in this manner the Gandhian technique necessarily goes beyond the confines of party and class, because it aims at converting, or revolutionising, members of all parties and classes. Socialism wishes to advance by setting class against class, Gandhism by cutting across classes. Socialism wishes to destroy classes by making one class victorious over the other—which seems to be somewhat illogical. Gandhism wishes to abolish classes by so bringing the classes together that there are no class distinctions left.

Socialism ultimately aims at creating a casteless society, but it wishes to make the State all-powerful by making the social revolution itself dependent upon State action. Gandhism, too, like socialism, aims at a stateless society. But on that account it proceeds more consistently by making the social process as little dependent upon the State as possible. The creation of the stateless society begins here and now, and is not relegated to a remote and imaginary period in the future. It is, therefore, a more truly revolutionary process and is more likely to reach the goal than the other processes.

For these reasons I should like to plead here for a closer study and understanding of Gandhism and the Gandhian technique. "Satyagraha," for instance, has become a fashion in socialist circles. But if satyagraha has to lead us to the free and equal and good society, and not degenerate into partisan warfare, we must understand it better. It should be realised that *any* peaceful action is *not* satyagraha. Satyagraha is based on faith in the possibility of change of heart. A particular satyagrahi may fail

in changing his opponent's heart, but that is not a failure of the faith. It is only his personal failure. In this manner satyagraha cannot be a partisan or a class struggle. Its appeal is to all parties and classes. It may not be possible for a satyagrahi to reach the ideal. But the important thing is that he should understand the ideal and work sincerely towards it. I am sure that if socialists approached this weapon in this spirit, they would become irresistible.

1954

13. Jeevandan*

THE Bodh Gaya Sarvodaya Sammelan was marked by the beginning of a new movement—*Jeevandan*. . . As I had some little part to play in this development, I should like briefly to explain. Comments published indicate that the move has not been adequately understood.

There is not much of a personal explanation to make, nor is there need for it. Suffice it to say that the decision I took was not made on the spur of the moment. I was being slowly driven to it for months past. Nor did the step signify repudiation of the ideals for which I had stood so long. It meant, rather, that I had realised that those ideals could be achieved and preserved better through the *Bhoodan* or the Gandhian way.

What, then, is the full significance of *Jeevandan*? *Jeevandan* in the sense of dedication of one's life to a cause, is nothing new. Moreover, amongst those who announced their *Jeevandan* at Bodh Gaya, there were many who were already leading dedicated lives. Was there need for them to re-dedicate their lives? And why was it necessary for any one so dedicating himself to forswear politics? These and similar questions rise to the mind. I shall attempt to answer them.

Jeevandan, in the first place, is not different from dedication of one's life to a cause. But it is a dedication to a particular cause :

* Article in *Janata*. *Jeevandan* means dedication of one's life to a cause. The *Jeevandan* movement began at the Bodh Gaya Sarvodaya Conference (1954) with Jayaprakash Narayan dedicating his life to the work of *Bhoodan* and the reconstruction of society on Gandhian lines. Vinoba Bhave, the founder of the *Bhoodan* movement and the chief source of inspiration to all Gandhian workers, marked the solemnity of this event by writing a note to J. P., re-dedicating his own life also.

not just to *Bhoodan*, as it has often been represented, but to all that for which *Bhoodan* stands. Practically all those who had gathered at Bodh Gaya were *Jeevandanis* in one sense or the other; that is, they had already dedicated their lives to politics, khadi, basic education, Harijan uplift, religion or something else. When some of them responded to my call and enlisted themselves as *Jeevandanis*, it did not seem that they were once again vowing to do what they were already doing and in this sense were making an empty or superfluous gesture. It meant, to the contrary, that they had witnessed so clear a vision of the *Bhoodan* movement in all its completeness as to have been moved to dedicate themselves to it, to the exclusion of every other activity, including politics.

What do we see in *Bhoodan* to be so moved? To superficial observers *Bhoodan* is just an agrarian reform movement, which at best, is preparing the ground for legislation. To those who have looked deep, it is a far more significant movement. It is the beginning of an all-round social and human revolution: human also because it aims at changing man along with society. It is an application on a general scale of Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent technique of revolution. In the words of Pyarelalji, "It is the spearhead of a non-violent revolution whose implications reach far and wide."

As is well known, Gandhiji's was the technique of conversion. Not only did he want to eschew violence for the construction of a new civilisation, but he did not wish even to rely on legislation as a primary instrument. He told Pyarelalji at the Agha Khan Palace: "So long as we have not got power, conversion is our weapon by necessity. But after we get power I maintain that conversion would have to be our weapon of choice. Conversion must precede legislation." Persuasion, change of heart and mind, creation of new social values and corresponding climate of opinion, non-co-operation with wrong where persuasion proved inadequate, these were Gandhiji's weapons. They served a two-fold purpose: they changed society and changed the individual. Law can do the first, but not the latter. No heart or mind has been changed by law; no individual made virtuous by coercion. Gandhiji's technique of conversion was based on faith in the possibility of improving man. This faith itself was grounded in another faith, namely, that all men irrespective of outward differences were fundamentally the same and at bottom good. Did

they not all come " trailing clouds of glory from God who is our home? "

How Gandhiji would have applied his technique to the reform of present society, who can tell. But as Pyarelalji has said " Gandhiji's idea is today reborn and is being pursued with spectacular success by Vinobaji—what we are witnessing today is the beginning of that thorough social awakening of which Bapu prophetically talked."

Bhoodan is thus a great mass movement of conversion and the creation of a new climate of thought and values of life. It brings about a living and immediate revolution in the minds of men and their mutual relationships. It attacks and corrects here and now the system of exploitation and inequality. It teaches men to share what they have with their fellowmen.

This revolutionary process could have been started in any other sphere than the agrarian. But this field was taken first because (a) land is a primary source of production ; (b) the land problem is a most urgent one ; (c) it affects the vast majority of our rural country. But above all because it was possible through the medium of land to put across the new economic idea and the social ethic much easier than through the medium of any other kind of property. What *Bhoodan* says about land is, according to Gandhiji, true of all our possessions, including even knowledge and skill. All wealth is a social product and no earning is possible without social co-operation. Whatever we possess, therefore, belongs to society. We are no more than the trustees of what we have, implicitly charged by society to take good care of our trust and use it for the benefit not of ourselves but of all our fellowmen. But whereas in the agrarian sphere the idea that land being a gift of nature belongs to the community is easily accepted, in the commercial, industrial or professional field, the corresponding idea would be difficult of general acceptance. But when *Bhoodan* has sown the seeds of this idea in five lakhs of our villages and persuaded lakhs of land owners to accept it in practice, even if partially, a psychological climate will have been created for the idea to take root and grow in other fields also. *Bhoodan*, indeed, has made sufficient progress already for the Sarvodaya Sammelan to have decided at Bodh Gaya to pay equal attention now to *Sampattidan*.

In the wake of this economic revolution reconstruction work will have to be undertaken. There is even now a good deal of constructive work being done, such as khadi, village industries, etc. But all these activities are carried on without causing any disturbance to the status quo. Khadi work in a village, for instance, might have been going on for a decade or two, but without affecting in the least the structure of village society. Such constructive work is barren or, at best, of a relief nature only. This was not Gandhiji's conception of constructive work. He was above all a revolutionary. He has himself written : "Some have called me the greatest revolutionary of my time. It may be false, but I believe myself to be a revolutionary—a non-violent revolutionary". It is the genius of Vinoba that he has discovered that revolutionary way.

To many constructive workers *Bhoodan* is still one of the many activities that might be taken up at leisure or on the side. But for a Gandhian, that is, a non-violent revolutionary, *Bhoodan* is not just one of the many constructive activities. It is the very ground of their being. In the context of *Bhoodan* construction becomes creative, in its absence it remains a dead activity. *Bhoodan* is like the flowing river, constructive activities the boats. Without the moving water the boats are static objects, stuck in the mud. But the river gives them motion and life and then they carry their passengers to their destination.

While many constructive workers, as I have said above, look upon *Bhoodan* as merely one of many possible activities, most politicians look upon it rather condescendingly as a well-intentioned movement that will help them in due course to achieve its objectives by legislation. They promise to give it their unhurried co-operation and what time they can spare from their more important work, self-assured that after all it is they who have the last word, because how can such far-reaching social and economic changes be brought about except by the State? This is the attitude of the politicians in general, whether they are actually in control of the State or only aspiring to it.

The *Bhoodan* movement is grateful for what aid the State and the politicians can give it, provided it is aid of the right sort. But it does not rely on the action of the State to achieve its ends. It relies, rather, on the action of the people : on *Janshakti* (power of the people) rather than *Dandashakti* (power of coercion).

Let us recall what Gandhiji said: "Even after we have power conversion would have to be our weapon of choice." This is why Vinobaji has been laying the utmost stress on the action of the people. A revolution, whether violent or non-violent, is wrought by the people and not by governments. Governments follow the people and put the seal of approval on what they have already done. As Gandhiji said, legislation comes after conversion. That is why Vinobaji is not shouting for legislation, as so many others are. He knows that after the people have acted legislation is bound to follow, no matter which party is in power.

Here we have an insight into the political theory of the *Bhoodan* movement. It does not aim at capturing the State in order to use it for its ends. As a corollary, it does not wish to create or become a political party in order to capture the State. It aims rather at persuading the people, independently of what the State may or may not want, to carry out a revolution in their own lives, and through that a revolution in society. It aims further at creating those conditions in which the people may manage their affairs directly, without the intermediation of parties and parliaments. Gandhism, like anarchism or communism, visualizes ultimately a stateless society. In the present world the State, not only in its totalitarian form but also in its welfare variety, is assuming larger and larger powers and responsibilities. The welfare State, in the name of welfare, threatens as much to enslave man to the State as the totalitarian. The people must cry halt to this creeping paralysis. The fact that the welfare State is a creature of the people, in the sense that it is set up by them, does not affect the matter. The device of democratic elections cannot equate five hundred representatives with eighteen crores (counting only the adults) of the people. To the extent the eighteen crores look after their affairs directly, to that extent the powers and functions of the State are restricted and real democracy is practised.

The experience of communist countries shows that if the immediate steps that are taken are not consistent with the ultimate goal, we may arrive at places that are vastly different from the ultimate destination. Placing before them the great ideal of a stateless society, the communists set out to do every thing through the power of the State. The result was that the State went on acquiring greater and greater powers and in place of the State withering away, there emerged the totalitarian State.

It is for this reason that the *Bhoodan* or Sarvodaya movement insists that if our ultimate aim is to do without the State we must here and now create those conditions in which the people will rely more and more on themselves and less and less on the State. No one can tell whether the State will ever completely disappear, but if we accept the ideals of a non-violent democracy, we must begin today to work for it.

It need hardly be added that a people who want to do without the State or who wish to lean on it as little as possible would be a self-regulated people—self disciplined, just and mutually co-operating.

In passing let me add that only when the people of the world become so, and governments have withered away or have been vastly deflated, that there will be peace in the world. War is not likely to be abolished by governments. Only the people who have freed themselves from their governments can do it. But I have digressed.

So much for the attitude of the *Bhoodan* movement towards politics. It remains to be added that, in a sense, *Bhoodan* is itself an intensely and deeply political movement. A movement that aims so utterly to revolutionise men and society cannot be unpolitical. But it is politics of the kind I have described above—not the politics of parties, elections, parliaments and governments; but politics of the people. Not *rajniti* but *lokniti*, as Vinoba says.

It is against the background of this wide sweep of the movement, its revolutionary and creative character, its ethical and humanist approach that our dedication to it is to be understood. I have seen commentaries on *Jeevandan* by persons who were expected to know better, who by equating it with any sort of selfless dedication of life have robbed it of its special significance. The special meaning of *Jeevandan* is that the *Jeevandani* believes that there is no other work of greater importance today than *Bhoodan* (using the term in its all inclusive sense) and that therefore every other activity must be subordinated to it. The call for *Jeevandan* went forth precisely for the reason, that except for a very small number, those who had flocked to the *Bhoodan* fold lacked this conviction and, therefore, the necessary singleness of purpose. The experience of the past three years had established beyond doubt the efficiency of Gandhiji's revolutionary philosophy and technique. The all-India target of 25 lakhs of acres by

30th April, 1954, was exceeded by no less than 8 lakhs. This was signal success. But the figure of 33 lakhs could easily have been a crore if there had been enough workers to take the message of Gandhi and Vinoba to every village and every home, and if the workers who did actually give their time had all been of the right type and worked devotedly and single-mindedly. As it was, most of the *Bhoodan* workers worked by fits and starts; many of them had not themselves understood the basic principles of the movement; many had not even made proper donations themselves of land or other properties; many worked from partisan and selfish motives in the hope of cashing in later for themselves and their parties. In view of this situation, it was little less than a miracle that so much was done in so short a time.

But if non-violence is to conquer violence, it must work faster. Otherwise events will overtake it and violence will overwhelm non-violence. There are urgent problems facing the people; if non-violence does not solve them soon, history will not stand still for the non-violent worker. The existing social order, with all its greed and selfishness and denial of humanity, its injustice and exploitation and inequality, must go. If non-violence does not change it soon, violence will step in. It is another matter that violence will not ultimately solve any problem, and one form of injustice and exploitation, greed and selfishness, will be replaced by another. But it will be too late before the people will be able to realize it all. In the meantime, forces of darkness will have taken over.

Therefore, some of us felt at Bodh Gaya that the time had come to impress on everyone concerned the urgency of the situation and the need to move much faster. Everything was favourable; the time spirit was with us; the people's response, in spite of occasional disappointments, was splendid. What was lacking was adequate band of devoted and worthy workers pledged to go all the way and to dedicate their lives to this great movement to the exclusion of everything else. Hence the call for *Jeevandan*.

The response at Bodh Gaya and since has been wonderful. But it is not enough. The work to be done is stupendous. Not less than five crores of acres of land have to be collected. The donated lands have to be distributed. The landless have to be provided with the means of utilization. In the villages where *Bhoodan* has succeeded a new order has to be created. *Gram Rajya*

in five lakhs of villages, *Sampattidan* in the towns and cities, ultimately transformation of capitalism into trusteeship. And many other things.

Man today is heading for self-destruction. The world trembles on the edge of a precipice. If it has to be saved, it is possible only if it is remade the *Bhoodan* or Sarvodaya way. There is need for international *Bhoodan* in the widest sense of the term.

All this great noble work beckons us. I cannot conceive of anything else worthier of our support or devotion. There are millions of us in this country. Out of this vast number are there not at least a few hundred thousand men and women selfless enough, courageous enough, far seeing enough to throw themselves into this historic movement? Future history, at any rate Indian history, may well depend on the answer to this question.

In the days of British rule young men of spirit refused to join the Services, in spite of the lure of high salaries and position. Now the Services are the main attraction for our promising youth. There is no harm in this. But the more sensitive and less self-centred among them should realize that routine administrative work, while necessary, is not going to build a new nation. Those who have political ambitions should realize that legislatures and governments, too, cannot build a nation. They may help, if they function properly; but they may also harm. It is only the people who can make themselves. It is, therefore, most important to go to the people and live with them and help them to help themselves.

Let the young men search their hearts. Do they want an easy life? Do they want to join the race of social and economic climbers, who after all climb only on the backs of the people? I do hope there are enough young men and women in the country who are prepared to embrace the hard life, the life of suffering, for a noble cause. There is not much time to lose, for the sands are running fast. It may be too late tomorrow.

A few words about the *Jeevandani*. They are not expected to forsake their hearth and home, their wives and children. They are not expected to become Sanyasins or Bikhus. We wish to better this world while living in it. But a *Jeevandani* is expected to embrace hardship and simplicity. If he has land or any other property or income, he is expected to make his due contribution to *Bhoodan* or *Sampattidan*. If he has no independent means of

livelihood, he is naturally not expected to live on air. If the inner voice prompts such a person to take the plunge, he should do so unhesitatingly in the faith that the great society whose full time servant he becomes will not forget him. The movement, needless to say, will do its best to look after him. But he should be prepared for hard and simple living. He should also be prepared for manual labour. If a *Jeevandani* belongs to any political party and believes that membership of the party does not conflict with the theory and practice of *Bhoodan*, he may retain his membership. But he will have to resign any office or elective post he may be holding and for life he will not be able to participate in elections. He may, however, cast his vote as his conscience tells him.

The *Bhoodan* movement, among other things, is making a valuable political experiment. It aims ultimately to create a non-party democracy. The present is a transitional phase in which various parties exist. The movement, therefore, invites members of every party to come and work together for Sarvodaya. In this it has two ends in view. First, it does not want parties and party membership to become a barrier to an advance towards Sarvodaya. Second, it wishes to teach that it is possible, holding different political views, to work together in spheres where no partisan differences exist. This working together and common experience might help, in the context of the direct, revolutionary and creative movement, to evolve a new political system.

Lastly, it should be obvious that the *Jeevandani*, who dedicates his life to human and social betterment, must begin with bettering himself. The *Jeevandani* is an ordinary mortal with the faults and foibles of his fellowmen. But the fact that he has vowed to devote his life to the remaking of men and society means that he has to begin with remaking himself. *Jeevandani* thus becomes a spiritual pilgrimage. For me at least this is its most valuable significance.

1956

14. New Dynamics of Social Change*

I am venturing to place before the delegates a rather heterodox view, a view that many of you may not even be prepared to accept as socialist.

You are all aware of the new technique that Mahatma Gandhi used in his struggle against the British power. That was a revolutionary departure from the normal technique of revolution, the like of which had not been witnessed before in history. You know that the weapons Gandhiji used were those of love and self-suffering. Instead of preaching hatred and violence, he preached love. Instead of inflicting suffering, he invited it. History is now a witness to the great success of that unique experiment.

It is my humble submission that that experiment was not just a flash in the pan of history, but a beacon-light in the darkness. I submit further that that light should be of particular interest to us socialists, because we too are trying to find a way out of the darkness.

Socialism has placed before mankind noble ideals of equality, freedom and fellowship; of peace and international brotherhood. But these ideals are yet distant dreams. The assumption of earlier days that once the socialists were in power, all the dreams would come true has proved to be too facile. And a real danger has arisen of the ideals and principles being forgotten or being given a back seat and the means or the doctrines being mistaken for the former. Socialists are faced with this danger everywhere but

* Address to the second Asian Socialist Conference held at Bombay.

more so in Asia. A recent study which I consider to be of great significance made by the Socialist Union of Great Britain and published as *Twentieth Century Socialism* sums up this danger for Western socialism in these words :

The ultimate source of the confusion and division which afflicts socialism today is that its true ends are being forgotten. The doctrinaires have deified the means that were once thought to bring certain salvation into ends in themselves. For them socialism is measured in terms of more public enterprise, more planning, more money spent on social services—irrespective of the results. The empiricists, on the other hand, in becoming more realistic about the choice of means, have scaled down their ends to nothing more than the immediately acceptable. In neither viewpoint is there any room for the ideals which have been the one enduring foundation of the socialist faith.

In the communist countries, too, we find the same process at work. There dictatorship is being equated with democracy, state capitalism with socialism, colonialism and national expansionism with world revolution. After forty years of revolution and socialist reconstruction equality and freedom, the most cherished values of socialism, lie trampled underfoot. In Asia it seems to me that there are two more dangers facing the socialist movement. One, that we might take only a negative view of socialism and regard our task as having been fulfilled if we succeeded in destroying feudalism and nascent capitalism. Two, that socialism might be equated with mere economic growth. All our countries, except Japan, are backward economically and many are desperately poor. Naturally, therefore, our attention goes first of all to the problem of economic growth. There is nothing wrong in that, but the mischief starts when we begin measuring "Socialist achievements" in terms of tons of steel and kilowatts of electricity. Economic growth, even rapid economic growth, is known to have occurred both under capitalism and fascism. Mere economic development is not a measure of socialism. I do not wish to suggest that it is not the business of socialists to see that more wealth were produced. What I wish to emphasise is the danger of equating socialism with economic development and of sacrificing the values of

socialism at the altar of that development. Another aspect of this danger is that when the values are pushed into the background, the production statistics take the front seats. The next step towards regimentation and dictatorship is then a matter of course. Because all the experts then find it easy to prove that economic growth particularly in a backward country cannot be rapid enough unless the State gathered into its hands adequate powers. We Asian socialists are for ever pointing our fingers at communist totalitarianism, but I am afraid if we do not distinguish between socialism and mere economic progress we also might be treading the same path.

I am sure every one of you here is aware of these dangers. The question is how are we going to fight these dangers. We in Asia are fortunate in that we have the experience of our socialist comrades in the West and also of the communists in the East before us. We can profit from their experience and learn from their successes and failures. But I am afraid we, too, instead of discovering new roads to the ideals, are getting caught in the theories, the institutions and organisations. I for one do not find any fresh approach to the problem. A great deal of thinking undoubtedly is going on, but all of it within the same old framework of socialist thought. The main, if not the whole, emphasis is still being placed on the control and use of the power of the State. Everywhere socialists are organised in political parties which are attempting to seize power and hoping thereafter to build a new society. The parties already in power are actually engaged in that task. But as I have said before, the ideals of socialism remain far in the distance.

The reason seems to me to be a wrong approach to these ideals. All of us agree that socialism is a way of life, an attitude of mind, a certain ethical behaviour. What is not so universally recognised is that such a way of life, attitude, behaviour, cannot be imposed from above by dictates of the government or by merely nationalising industry and abolishing capitalism. Construction of a socialist society is fundamentally construction of a new type of human being. The importance of such human reconstruction is admitted on all sides, but I am afraid no sooner the admission is made than it is forgotten and every one joins the race to get on the State wagon. Clearly if human reconstruction is the key to socialist reconstruction, and if that is beyond

the scope of the State, the emphasis in the socialist movement must change from political action to such work of reconstruction. The question is—and I think it is the most important question for socialism—how is such human reconstruction possible? By education, some may reply. Education, no doubt, can play a valuable part, but it is not an adequate answer to the question. What is needed is a socialist movement, a mass movement, of human reconstruction. Such a movement, to my mind, would be the real socialist movement. Such a movement, obviously, will be non-political in the sense that its aim will not be the capture of the State, because the State will be irrelevant to its purpose, namely, the remaking of man.

What will be the dynamics of such a movement? So far the dynamics of social change has been the conflict of self-interests. The self-interest of labour has been juxtaposed to the self-interest of capital, the intermediary interests choosing their side according to their own view of the main conflict. Labour actuated by self-interest wishes to create a different social order in which it is assumed selfishness will not rule the lives of men. Here you have a fundamental contradiction. As the Hindi proverb says you cannot plant a thorn-tree and expect it to bear mangoes.

I think, therefore, that a new dynamics has to be found in consonance with the ultimate values of socialism. The reason the ideals of socialism are eluding the socialist movement is that the approach to them is faulty. Socialism has been defined in various ways. I would like to define a socialist society as one in which the individual is prepared *voluntarily* to subordinate his own interest to the larger interest of society. The key word in this definition is the word *voluntary*. Men may be forced in various ways to subordinate their interest to the interest of others, but as there is force needed to do so, socialism would be limited, even distorted, may be even denied. Equality, freedom and fellowship can never become realities unless the moral evolution of the individual has been such that he is voluntarily prepared to limit his wants and his freedom in the interest of his fellow human beings. A socialist society cannot be built up if every individual wants and hankers after more and more for himself. Unless the individual learns the lesson of self-control and adopts a way of life based on such control, strife between man and man and between his groups, classes and nations, is bound to continue.

Science has placed in the hands of man the means of an ample life. In the midst of this possibility of universal happiness there is universal misery because of man's covetousness, his greed, his selfishness. The world is plagued by wars—cold and shooting wars—and threatened with total destruction, not because there is not enough for everyone, but because everyone wants the most for himself. I fear that unless the moral development of man caught up with his scientific and technological development, his fate is pretty tightly sealed.

Therefore, what is needed is not a system of dynamics based on a conflict of interests, but one that is based on the values of the society that we all wish to create. What is needed is not so much a movement for the capture of power, but a movement that required that those who participated in it should begin here and now to live the new way of life. Let those who believe in the ideals and values of socialism begin to live them now. If we believe in equality, for instance, let us begin to practise it. Real equality is not possible, to my mind, unless members of society live according to the noble Marxian ideal, "from each according to his capacity and to each according to his needs." No State can force the individual to live in accordance with this ideal. It can be put into practice only if it is willingly accepted by the community. Therefore, let those who believe in equality proceed to live accordingly. Equality does not consist in taking from the rich and distributing to the poor. If the poor tried to establish equality by merely distributing the wealth of the wealthy amongst themselves, without accepting the philosophy of life behind it, they would soon recreate different forms of inequality amongst themselves. And if the poor accepted the new philosophy and practised it in their own lives and if they did it on a mass scale, the rich would not remain behind. Likewise with the other values and ideals of socialism.

At this stage I shall be reminded of the various efforts made in Europe and America of establishing little colonies whose members lived according to the ideals of socialism. They failed because they were limited in scope and area; they were little islands in the hostile ocean of capitalism. I believe Mahatma Gandhi discovered a way of developing mass movements through internal change in man, that is to say, mass moral revolutions. The world would be justified in expecting India to set an example

in this respect. But I am sorry to say that while Gandhiji's name is on the lips of every one here, our eyes are turned eagerly to others. The lure of power is too great, and every one who wants to do anything for his country wants to get to the seats of power. The only exception, as you all know perhaps, is Vinoba Bhave and the small group of workers around him. His *Bhoodan* Movement, of which you might have heard something, is an experiment in the new social dynamics of which I have been speaking. He is trying to develop a mass movement—and he has largely succeeded in it—for persuading people to live a life of sharing and to renounce the notion of individual ownership of property. Wealth can be distributed by law, but shared only voluntarily. Distribution of wealth may be an uncertain step towards socialism, but sharing of wealth is real and full socialism.

I cannot say, comrades, how these ideas and this new technique can be applied to your own countries. But I do hope you will give your thought to the submission I have made this evening.

1957

15. From Socialism to Sarvodaya*

Dear Comrades,

After long deliberation I have decided to write you this letter. It has not been easy for me to do it, because it is never easy to cut oneself away from an association of a life-time. We have worked together, and together have we suffered imprisonment, lived through the adventures of the underground, and tasted the ashes of independence. We have all far to travel yet.

But I, on my part at least, find myself at a point of the journey where I must decide to part company and walk it alone. It would have gladdened my heart beyond measure had I been able to persuade you to come along with me, but I realise that that is not possible—at least for the present. I hope, however, that our paths will often meet and that at the journey's end they will merge together. We may not live to see that consummation ourselves, but I feel confident that if the world were ever to reach the port of peace and freedom and brotherhood, socialism must eventually merge into sarvodaya.

It was three years ago, at the Bodh Gaya Sarvodaya Sammelan, that I decided to give up politics, But I had continued to be a member of the PSP ; though apart from attending an

* Statement issued in the form of a letter to the members of the Praja Socialist Party on the occasion of resignation from the membership of that Party. It was serialised by several newspapers and later published as a pamphlet by the Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh (Kashi), with an introduction by Vinoba Bhave.

occasional meeting or offering occasional advice I took no part in the activities of the Party. Sometime before the last General Election I came to the decision that I should give up even the sleeping membership of the PSP. But Acharyaji was ill and I did not want to take the step without discussing the matter with him. To the great misfortune of this country and of the socialist cause, Acharya Narendra Deva passed away. It was a staggering blow to the PSP, which had already been weakened by a split. Leading comrades, therefore, pleaded with me not to announce any resignation till the elections were over. I agreed, but it was understood that soon after the elections the announcement would be made. The delay in doing this has been due entirely to the fact that I was anxious to place before you and before the country generally the reasons that led me to take such a drastic step—i.e., a step that was natural to me but appears so drastic to others. Almost every day someone or another raises the question with me why at all should I have given up politics. The faith and hope that people seem to repose in politics appear pitiable to me, but I find it difficult to explain to every one individually the rationale of my action. I am attempting to do so here.

The hold of politics on the minds of people is such and its alternative is in such an incipient state yet, that I shall not probably be able to persuade many of those who may read this statement; but I do hope there will be more mutual understanding and also a quickening of interest in the ideas herein propounded. There is also another aspect of the matter. Everyone views things from his own particular background. Those who have not gone through the experiences which I have passed through, nor pursued the ideals which have been mine might fail to appreciate my reasoning. A new enthusiast for socialism, or the class struggle, or political action, or parliamentary democracy may not perhaps be able to follow me until he has come to enquire how the drawbacks that he has discovered in his particular enthusiasm can be remedied. I am not for a moment suggesting that I have arrived at a flawless solution of all social problems or that sarvodaya is the last word in social philosophy. Man is ever progressing towards the truth, for he is by nature an enquiring being. He will never be able to reach the ultimate truth, but, by gradually eliminating untruth, he will be able slowly to approach truth. There is no doubt that many flaws in sarvodaya thought

and practice will be discovered and removed in the future, and thus the human mind will keep up its ascent to truth. But I do believe that sarvodaya represents a distinct advance over the existing social philosophies and systems. I shall try to explain the process through which I arrived at this conclusion. What follows is by no means a full statement of the sarvodaya philosophy, for which task I have no adequate equipment in any case, but a narration of the evolution of my own thinking that led me finally to renounce politics.

I

From Non-cooperation to Communism

The past course of my life might well appear to the outsider as a zigzag and tortuous chart of unsteadiness and blind groping. But as I look back I discern in it a uniform line of development. The groping undeniably was there, but it was certainly not blind; there were clear beacons of light that remained undimmed and unaltered from the beginning and that led me on to my apparently tortuous path. I, at least, am not sorry for having made this zigzag journey, for, it has made me the surer of the path that I have now decided to tread.

As a boy, like most boys of those days, I was an ardent nationalist and leaned towards the revolutionary cult of which Bengal was the noble leader at that time. But even then the story of the South African satyagraha had fascinated my young heart. Before my revolutionary leanings could mature, Gandhiji's first non-cooperation movement swept over the land as a strangely uplifting hurricane. I, too, was one of the thousands of young men of those days, who, like leaves in the storm, were swept away and momentarily lifted up to the skies. That brief experience of soaring up with the winds of a great idea left imprints on the inner being that time and much familiarity with ugliness of reality have not removed.

It was then that freedom became one of the beacon lights of my life, and it has remained so ever since. Freedom, with the passing of the years, transcended the mere freedom of my country and embraced freedom of man everywhere and from every sort of trammel—above all, it meant freedom of the human personality, freedom of the mind, freedom of the spirit. This freedom has become a passion of life and I shall not see it compromised

for bread, for power, for security, for prosperity, for the glory of the State or for anything else.

Strangely enough, it was in the land of resilient and successful capitalism, in the United States of America, which was my home from 1922 to 1929, that I became a convert to Marxism, or more precisely, to Soviet Communism as it was then. It was at Madison, Wisconsin, the home of La Follette progressivism then, that in the company of Jewish and European-born fellow students I drank deep at the fountain of Marxism. I think we left nothing unread of Marxism that was available in the English language then and with the help of a brilliant student of German even read some of the untranslated Marxian classics. The pungent writings of M. N. Roy that found their way from Europe into the communist cells, particularly of Asian students, completed the conversion to Marxism.

Freedom still remained the unchanging goal, but the Marxian science of revolution seemed to offer a surer and quicker road to it than Gandhiji's technique of civil disobedience and non-cooperation. The thrilling success of the great Lenin, accounts of which we consumed with unsatiated hunger, seemed to establish beyond doubt the supremacy of the Marxian way to revolution.

At the same time, Marxism provided another beacon of light for me: equality and brotherhood. Freedom was not enough. It must mean freedom for all—even the lowliest—and this freedom must include freedom from exploitation, from hunger, from poverty. I cannot say what were the early experiences that had laid the foundations in the subconscious mind of sympathy with poverty and suffering. But the latent sympathy certainly was there, and it was awakened and brought to the surface of conscious living by Marxism. This process was reinforced by the mode of my life in the United States. Coming from the lower middle class, I hardly received any help from my family and had to work as an ordinary labourer in field and factory to earn my upkeep and the expenses of university education. At that time I was not very certain about Gandhiji's stand on the vital question of equality which captivated me as much as the ideal of freedom. As a matter of fact, Roy's writings of those days (though Roy, too, later travelled far from those positions) persuaded me to believe that Gandhiji was against the social revolution and would at a moment of crisis hasten to uphold the system of

exploitation and inequality. I did not understand then that Gandhiji had his own conception of the social revolution and of the means to achieve it.

II

From Communism to Democratic Socialism

The end of '29, when I returned to my country, was not a propitious time for Marxism. Nationalism was reaching white heat and when, in December of that year, Gandhiji failed to persuade Lord Irwin (as he then was) to agree to full "dominion status" for India, in terms of the Calcutta Congress Resolution (1928), the stage was set for a gigantic leap towards national freedom. Complete independence was set as the goal of the nation, and early next year Mahatma Gandhi launched his celebrated Salt Satyagraha. Naturally, I plunged into the fray with all my heart. But I did not find the Indian communists anywhere on the battle lines. Some of them, no doubt, were in prison in connection with the Meerut Conspiracy case. But there were many who were outside and the underground organisation of the CPI did exist in some form or other. But even in the underground of the national movement, where I soon found myself, the communists were nowhere in evidence, though subterranean channels could have easily connected the two undergrounds. Worse, I came to know that they were denouncing the national movement as bourgeois and Mahatma Gandhi as a lackey of the Indian bourgeoisie. I do not wish to recall that whole story of folly and shame. I have made a reference to it here only to indicate how my differences arose with the Indian communists and their brand of Marxism. The communists in India were only following, of course, the policy laid down by the Third or Communist International which by then had come completely under the leadership of Stalin. The patently mistaken policy that the Comintern had been following since 1928 and which had resulted in the division of the labour and socialist movements throughout the world and in the isolation of the communists from the national movements in all the colonial countries, appeared to me, as indeed it was later acknowledged to be, contrary to Marxist theory generally and specifically to the famous colonial policy enunciated by Lenin. My differences with the CPI thus marked the beginning of my ideological alienation from Soviet Russia

itself, which to me was till then the paragon and exemplar of all communist virtues. The ideological conflict and struggle for power that had gone on in Russia for some years prior to this had not yet produced any positive reaction in me, apart from a suppressed anxiety. Indeed, there was not much information available yet regarding those matters. But when at home I was face to face with a Soviet dictated policy which my Marxism just could not be reconciled with, I could not help being somewhat alienated.

I naturally kept away from the CPI and joined the ranks of the soldiers of freedom. But freedom or swaraj had come by then to mean much more to me than mere national independence. Free India to me meant socialist India and swaraj the rule of the poor and down-trodden. Congress policy and programme on this score, in spite of the famous Karachi declaration [1931], seemed vague and inadequate. Naturally, with other like-minded fighters for freedom, we formed the Congress Socialist Party so that the social policy of the Congress might become more definitely socialist and the fight for independence itself might be conducted in a more revolutionary manner—which meant, in Marxian terminology, the linking of the movement for national freedom with the movement for economic and social emancipation of the masses. The Congress Socialist Party played a notable part in giving shape to the socio-economic content of Congress policy and a hard edge to the struggle for freedom. By and large, the Congress Socialists were among the most uncompromising and undaunted soldiers of freedom.

As the national movement raged in the early thirties, shocking developments were taking place in Europe which were crowned eventually by Hitler's rise to absolute power. Stalin had predicted an early fall for Hitler, because a half-mad person was not likely to solve the complex and difficult problems of Germany; and on the rubble of Hitler's power, so had Stalin prophesied, would be raised the edifice of communist Germany. When nothing of the sort happened, however; when Hitler, on the contrary, consolidated his power and suppressed the communists and the socialists and the great trade unions; when he began to prepare for world conquest and when his plans began to succeed, fright ultimately overtook the master of the Kremlin, and then a volte face was quickly affected.

It is the vogue now to dig Stalin's mistakes out of the grave. Khrushchev has dug out some. Zhukov seems eager to dig deeper. I have no desire to follow this vogue, but I should like to repeat what I have said elsewhere that a time will come when the gravest of Stalin's mistakes—the costliest and the most criminal—would be pronounced to be the disruptive policies which he followed that made it possible for Hitler to seize power. Had not the German communists declared, under Stalin's inspiration, the social democrats to be “the enemy number one” and the Nazis enemy only after them, Hitler could never have become the master of Germany. If the policy of socialist unity and popular front which was adopted after the victory of Nazism had been followed from the beginning, the course of history would have been different and the horrors of Hitlerism and the Second World War forestalled or at least vastly mitigated.

The popular front policy had its echo in India in the CPI's own dutiful volte face and its sudden recognition and support, after years of abuse and calumny, of the Indian National Congress as a National Front. Still wedded to Marxism, this new policy filled my heart with joy and sent my hopes rising high. I began to dream of the possibility of a united socialist-communist party and of the rapid strides that both the freedom movement and Indian socialism could make under such united leadership!

Some of my leading colleagues such as Ram Manohar Lohia, M. R. Masani, Achyut Patwardhan and Asoka Mehta were opposed to this policy and felt sure that it would end in disaster. But my Marxist zeal had the better of me, and with the support of such a respected colleague as Narendra Deva I went ahead with my dreams and hopes. A compact was arrived at with the CPI, according to which membership of the CSP was opened to the communists, CSP branches, particularly in the South, were deliberately handed over to them in preference to loyal CSPers, communists were elected to the AICC and other Congress bodies with CSP support, and in the trade union movement it was agreed to work together.

The disastrous consequences of that policy are well known, one of which, incidentally, was that the whole of the South was lost by the CSP to the CPI. But that nightmarish experience resulted in one great good. It taught us a great lesson in politics. We learnt, some of us with not a little regret, that there cannot

be any unity with an "official" communist party (i.e., a party affiliated to the Comintern or approved of by the Kremlin); that such a communist party is not a free agent but a tool of Moscow; that the primary loyalty of the members of such a party is first to Russia and only then to anybody else; that when the communist parties talk of united front, it is always a ruse and at best a temporary policy dictated by the exigencies of the situation; that their unswerving goal is always monolithic communist rule; that the communists can never think of sharing power with any one, except as a makeshift with convenient stooges. These were valuable lessons, but perhaps the price paid was too high. The war further reinforced these conclusions and led to a decisive annulment of the engagement that had been entered into with so much hope.

International communism is presently going through the pangs of a new birth, but it is too early yet to say whether the issue will be still-born or otherwise. Men like me wish with all their heart for the happier eventuality.

Apart from our own direct experience with the CPI, certain other developments had been taking place about the same time in Soviet Russia itself that powerfully influenced my thinking. These were the infamous trials of renowned Russian communist leaders, whose writings I had eagerly devoured and who were to me great revolutionary heroes, who had made, as Lenin's closest lieutenants, the greatest revolution in history.

Along with the accounts of these trials came studies by men, whom I believed to be honest, of the iniquitous regime that had in course of time been clamped down upon Russia. Eugene Lyons' *Assignment In Utopia*—a fine literary work to my mind—was one of the earliest studies that deeply disturbed me. Then came other accounts. John Dewey's probe into the Trotsky affair and his findings were impossible to resist. The accusations against men like Kamenev, Zinoviev, Radek, Rykov, Bukharin and their alleged confessions were revolting in the extreme. Other and lesser lights of the communist firmament followed the same gruesome fate. Khrushchev has now denounced some of the later trials in which he himself did not have a hand. I have no doubt that as freedom advances in Soviet Russia, other communist leaders will expose other atrocities and a day will come when even Trotsky will be rehabilitated.

Howsoever that may be, all these events and experiences compelled me to re-examine the basic postulates of Marxism. Most of my colleagues in the socialist movement are acquainted with that painful process of re-thinking because we passed together through that phase. The whole course of development of the CSP and then of the (old) Socialist Party was vitally influenced by this process of ideological re-education.

The CSP had started as a Marxist-Leninist group; and we always claimed during the earlier years that both the CPI and the Kremlin were misapplying Marxism-Leninism to India particularly and to the world situation generally. But now I came seriously to question if Marxism-Leninism, no matter what its interpretation, was itself a safe guide to the social revolution and to socialism. If the theory of violence as a midwife of revolution was not challenged in its entirety, at least this much became clear to me (a) that in a society where it was possible for the people by democratic means to bring about social change it would be counter-revolutionary to resort to violence and (b) that socialism could not exist, nor be created, in the absence of the democratic freedoms. As a logical corollary, I rejected the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which in effect meant the dictatorship of a bureaucratic oligarchy.

The Russian revolution had started as a people's revolution that had the active support of the broad masses of Czarist Russia, but Lenin converted it into a minority revolution when he forcibly dissolved the Constituent Assembly in which he was in a small minority and seized power with the help of rebel soldiers and the urban working class. The subsequent miscarriage of the revolution and distortion of socialism, to my mind, was the direct result of the forcible seizure of power by a minority.

Thus I was led to the conclusion that even where the people lacked the democratic freedoms, a violent revolution must have popular support and the revolutionary government must have the backing of the majority of the people. It is easier during a revolution for the popular will to be expressed than during constitutional elections. A social revolution must be allowed full freedom to find its own democratic expression. The people's instinct is always in favour of freedom and democracy and it is never natural for them deliberately to subject themselves to a dictatorship. The communists everywhere, under Lenin's brilliant

inspiration, have tried by devious methods to clamp down upon the people their minority and dictatorial rule. Perhaps we have an exception to this in China where a larger section of the people seems to have been with Mao Tse-tung than with Chiang Kai-shek, though that does not mean that the Chinese Government is not a dictatorship. Perhaps it is a dictatorship of the majority over the minority. Perhaps, again, this is so in Yugoslavia. Elsewhere communist rule is a minority rule. But whether in minority or majority, the communists, wherever in power, have invariably established a dictatorship which in their usual "double talk" language they call people's or even socialist democracy. All this drove me to the conclusion that the path to socialism did not pass through dictatorship of any kind.

The Soviet experience made it further clear to me that socialism was not merely the negation of capitalism; that it was possible for capitalism to be destroyed, for industry, trade, banking, agriculture—all to be nationalised and collectivised, and yet to remain far from socialism: nay, not only to remain far from socialism, but even to go counter to it. In Soviet Russia we saw not only denial of "formal" freedom, but also denial of social justice, of equality; we saw the growth of a new class of bureaucratic rulers, of new forms of exploitation. All this was not only the absence of socialism but also its negation.

It seemed to me that all that had happened in Russia was not the result of the wicked deeds of a paranoiac, as Khrushchev would have us believe now, but the end product of the socio-economic system that was set up there. Over-centralisation of political and economic authority and total statism were clearly at the bottom of the evil. Looking back even that does not appear to be a sufficient answer now, because it is pertinent to ask what was at the bottom of the over-centralisation and the statism. The answer seems to be two-fold.

One. Marx conceived the socialist revolution as a historic process to be brought about by the proletariat, which would naturally constitute the great majority of the population of a fully industrialised bourgeois nation. Lenin, on the other hand, sought to engineer a socialist revolution in an industrially backward country through a seizure of power by a determined band of revolutionaries, organised in a highly centralised and semi-militarily disciplined party. As John Kautsky puts it in his

excellent article, "From Marx to Mao" (*Soviet Survey*, June-July 1957):

Marx believed that socialism would grow out of existing material condition, and that the working class itself would be the revolutionary agent introducing socialism at a time when the economy had reached the necessary maturity. At the root of Lenin's thought, on the other hand, as at that of all the impatient pre-Marxian socialists from Babeuf to Bakunin lay the notion that the realisation of socialism was a matter not of historically conditioned prerequisites, but merely of insight, will, and above all, of the conquest of political power.

Two. Stalin, following Lenin's direction, carried through a highly pressurised and forced process of industrialisation of a backward country. This, in the very nature of things, could not be accomplished without regimentation, compulsion and suppression of freedom. As Professor Paul A. Baran, perhaps the only Marxist teaching at a major American University (Stanford), writes (*The Political Economy of Growth*, N.Y. 1957) :

It is merely the cult of personality in reverse to ascribe all the crimes and errors committed in the Soviet Union before the Second World War and in all of Eastern and South-eastern Europe after it to the evil personalities of Stalin, Beria, and their associates. Matters are not so simple ; and the general feeling is wholly understandable that it is indeed the 'entire system' that must be held responsible for what was perpetrated by the leadership. Yet it is a grievous fallacy to conclude from this that socialism is the entire 'system' that needs to be repudiated. For it is not socialism that can be fairly charged with the misdeeds of Stalin and his puppets—it is the political system that evolved from the drive to develop at breakneck speed a backward country threatened by foreign aggression and in face of internal resistance. [Italics mine].

These two social processes together explain the politico-economic forms that ultimately came to be established in Russia and have since been copied in every communist country.

This incidentally has a great lesson for India and, indeed, for all the industrially backward countries of Asia. Every Asian country is eager to force the pace towards industrialisation. Russia and the other communist countries warn us of what happens when that pace is forced too hard. Asia, therefore, must find its own road to socialism and its own pattern of industrialisation. It would be an illusion to think that the pace of industrialisation would not matter if the process were carried out under democratic aegis; beyond a certain limit the pace itself would give rise necessarily to conditions of dictatorship.

As I began to perceive some of these things, my mind naturally turned towards ideas of decentralisation and the gradual attenuation of the State and the fashioning of alternative forms of collective behaviour and social control.

In Marxism any means are good means provided they serve the ends of the social revolution. Thus Marxism as a philosophy of action is amoral. But though the Marxists are roundly denounced for their amorality, the latter is not their peculiar speciality by any means. Politicians of all brands from time immemorial have practised amorality, no matter how much they might have denounced it in words. Even today the axiom about the end justifying the means is the basis of political action everywhere. It is rarely, as when a great soul like Mahatma Gandhi strays into the political field, that a serious attempt is made to wed politics to morality.

The evil ends that had resulted from the evil means in Russia, particularly the foul means that were used to perpetrate the staggering crimes during the purges, revolted me from the "revolutionary ethics" of Marxism and forced me to question if good ends could ever be achieved by bad means.

It will be noticed that all this questioning and re-thinking was gradually bringing me nearer to Gandhiji. But I had not yet been completely converted and so found myself at the half-way house of democratic socialism.

During my more ardent Marxian days I was a bitter critic, naturally, of European social democracy and British fabianism and pragmatic socialism. On the rebound, therefore, I was anxious not to get stuck in what I had so long considered to be the quagmire of reformism and revisionism. Mine would yet be a revolutionary socialism, I thought, which would transform

society from the roots and would yet preserve and uphold the great human values of freedom, equality and brotherhood. It must be admitted that to give a concrete form to this new socialism was not easy, and the task is yet to be fulfilled.

Since Asia regained her political freedom from Europe (the process is yet to be completed), European socialists have been visiting us and giving us all manner of advice. All this advice and friendship are welcome, but there is one little matter which the European socialists must not forget. If European communism has failed, European socialism has been no conspicuous success, either. It was Germany whose Social Democratic Party was a pride of international socialism and which had been nurtured by some of the greatest names in the history of socialism—Engels himself, Bebel, Kautsky, the elder Liebknecht (to whom Marx had dedicated the first volume of his *Capital*) and many others. And yet German Social Democracy, when presented a chance by history after the First World War, foundered hopelessly. The record of French socialism has been most depressing, the crowning infamy being the association of the Guy Mollet Government with the British Conservative Government in the imperialist attack on Egypt [1956]. British Labour under Attlee—particularly during Attlee's first government [1945-1950]—no doubt, set a fine record both at home and abroad. And during the Egyptian interlude Gaitskell's leadership doubtlessly raised high the prestige of British socialism. But there are many skeletons yet in the cupboard of British socialists and Great Britain is far away yet from a socialist democracy. The welfare State, which is constantly under Conservative fire, is a poor substitute for socialism, and that too seems to be in the danger of being converted into the "opportunity state" of Macmillan. True, in Scandinavia, particularly in Sweden, democratic socialism has achieved a larger measure of success, but there, too, it cannot be said that the socialist ideals have been fully realised. Perhaps the comparative success of socialism in Sweden has been due, among other things, to the small size of the Swedish community and the relatively greater emphasis on the non-State forms of socialism, such as cooperation; both factors, as we shall see, are of great pertinence to the evolution of socialism into sarvodaya.

European socialism, both Marxian and non-Marxian, is, among other things, the picture of an industrialised society.

Socialism, according to Marx as much as to other European socialist thinkers, was a stage of society that came after the maturing of capitalism. In Asia industrial capitalist development is in its infancy and Asian countries are overwhelmingly rural and agrarian communities. The task of building up socialism in such an environment is not familiar to European socialists; so there is little guidance that can be obtained from their experience. The communists have no doubt been successful—in the sense of capturing power—precisely in backward and rural communities, such as Russia and China. But the “socialism” that they have built up is a far cry from the brotherhood of the equal and the free which to me is the essence of true socialism.

Asian socialists, therefore, are left very much to their own devices. I am not suggesting that we have nothing to learn from Western socialism or Russian communism, but the bulk of our work of thinking, experimenting, innovating, we have to do ourselves. I am afraid this process of original enquiry has been lapsed for the past few years in the Indian socialist movement. It is time that the thread of enquiry is picked up again. This process should be facilitated by two different trends of development: one, the unfolding of the Gandhian technique of social revolution and reconstruction as exemplified in the *Bhoodan*, *Gramdan* and *Gramraj* movements and the accumulating experience of State ownership and bureaucratic management of economic enterprise which is being misconceived as socialism.

This process of re-examination and re-evaluation that I have briefly traced above was a collective experience of those who were working in the CSP and the old Socialist Party. The conclusions that I have indicated above were also collective in nature. The emphasis on democracy, the need for decentralisation, the realisation that means must be morally consistent with the ends—these were the common conclusions drawn from a common experience. Thus the Marxist-Leninist CSP, through several incarnations, developed into the democratic-socialist PSP.

III

From Socialism to Sarvodaya

Thus far I travelled together with my colleagues in happy comradeship, the memory of which will sweeten the remaining part of my life. But some years back my journey took a turning where

we parted company. That parting began with what has come to be grandiloquently known as *Jeevandan* [1954], but which was no more than a decision on my part to withdraw from party-and-power politics and to devote the rest of my life to the *Bhoodan* and *Sarvodaya* movement.

The same old beacon lights of freedom, equality and brotherhood that had guided the course of my life and brought me to democratic socialism, drew me onwards around this turning of the road. My regret is that I did not reach this point in my life's journey while Gandhiji was still in our midst. However, some years back it became clear to me that socialism as we understand it today cannot take mankind to the sublime goals of freedom, equality, brotherhood and peace. Socialism, no doubt, gives promise to bring mankind closer to those goals than any other competing social philosophy. But I am persuaded that unless socialism is transformed into sarvodaya, those goals would remain beyond its reach; and just as we had to taste the ashes of independence, so future generations may have to taste the ashes of socialism.

My final break with Marxism, though not with politics, had come during the three weeks fast at Poona [1952]. It was then that a long process of questioning started by the Russian purges came to an end and it became clear that materialism as a philosophical outlook could not provide any basis for ethical conduct and any incentive for goodness.

If man and his consciousness and the society and culture which he has built up are mere manifestations of matter—howsoever dialectically active—I can see no reason why in such a society anyone should try to be good, that is, be generous, kind, unselfish. Why should then one feel sympathy with those who are weak, poor or sick? What is matter will dissolve into matter after death. So what incentive can there be for moral behaviour? Lust for power or wealth, or desire to win the acclaim of the people, or the regard of one's peers, may be incentives to action. But such incentives can have no concern with valuations of right or wrong. Ethical ideas have no doubt a history and a social origin, but when the individual begins to question his inherited standards of conduct and asks himself why he should act ethically, materialism offers him no answer. A person may have grown up with the ideals of social service, sacrifice, freedom, equality and

the rest. But if he begins later to ask himself why he should subscribe to those ideals at all and put himself to trouble and loss on their account, the philosophy of materialism, dialectical or otherwise, would not be able to give him any satisfactory answer. I am not suggesting that among philosophical materialists there have not been examples of great sacrifice for noble causes. What I am suggesting is that their action was not consistent with their philosophy.

A way out of this difficulty may be the assumption that the human being is an automaton, that his behaviour is wholly conditioned and that he has no choice of action and no freedom of will. On this assumption, of course, Marx and Lenin could not help work and suffer for the exploited peoples of the earth. But I doubt whether even the most bigoted Marxist would be prepared to reduce man to such a mechanical entity. Indeed, the whole Marxian theory of revolutionary leadership is based on the assumption of free will.

A great debate has raged in philosophy whether matter came first or consciousness. The point is that no matter which came first, there are today modes of existence that may be described as matter and consciousness. The mistake Marxism made was to assume that consciousness (whatever its origin) could be understood in the same manner as matter. It did not realise that the laws of matter cannot be applied to the realm of consciousness. The study of matter is an objective exploration, whereas that of consciousness is subjective realisation. The study of matter, the objective exploration, science in short, is necessarily amoral. The Marxists (and the materialists generally), having reduced consciousness to a behaviour of matter, naturally knocked the bottom out of ethics. They talk a good deal no doubt of revolutionary ethics, but that is nothing more than the crassest application of the theory that the end justifies the means. Once an individual persuades himself, sincerely or otherwise, that he is on the side of the revolution (or the Party or the People) he is free to commit any infamy whatsoever.

Not only the Marxists and materialists, but also those who differ from them in philosophy attempt to understand consciousness by the methods of science. Mental science also, therefore, provides no basis for moral behaviour. Nor is it ever possible for science to understand consciousness, which can only be

subjectively experienced. Subjective experience is by its very nature incapable of being expressed in material categories. Therefore, all the mystics and yogis who had experience of subjective reality, or absolute consciousness, have been unable to express it in any language. As Roger Godel has said: "The philosopher thinks his philosophy; the sage lives his wisdom."

Modern science has reached a point where the dualism of matter and consciousness becomes too tenuous to be real. Says Godel in his essay on *The Contemporary Science and the Liberative Experience of Yoga*:

But now suddenly—around a bend of quantum mechanics—exploration of the objective field brings the theorist of the physical sciences to a most disquieting position; before him appears an ambiguous universe where the observer and the phenomenon observed are inextricably commingled. So close is their confrontation that each is reflected in the other, powerless to separate or to fuse.

In this realm of indetermination, all the symbols and formulas familiar to our experience of things vanish. Notions of energy and of matter require so profound a transformation as to lose their original meaning; energy condenses into matter, matter dematerialises into radiation. The waves associated with the propagation of light quanta need no substratum in order to propagate in space-time; they undulate neither in a fluid, nor in a solid, nor yet in gas. Only the unreal thread of analogy links them to the image of a wave rippling the surface of water. They are in fact waves of probability, waves of consciousness which our thought projects afar: curvilinear variation of an abstract function.

Science cannot resolve this dualism completely, because in objective study the seer and the seen must remain different, no matter how "inextricably commingled." It is only in the ultimate spiritual experience that this dualism is shed and the seer and seen become one.

The root of morality lies in the endeavour of man to realise this unity of existence, or, to put it differently, to realise his Self. For one who has experienced this unity, the practice of morality becomes as natural and effortless as the drawing of breath.

To some all this might appear to be irrelevant to the political and economic struggle. In all humility, I would demur. All actions, personal or public, political, economic or other should have an integration and the centre of this integration must be a philosophy of life.

This leads me at once to an aspect of the task of social and economic reconstruction that both socialists and communists have neglected. Socialism and communism both lay great emphasis on material prosperity, on ever-growing production and on an ever-rising standard of living. It cannot be denied that the material wants of man must be reasonably fulfilled. And when it is realised that socialists and communists are always the advocates of the poor and downtrodden, their emphasis on material progress and happiness can be appreciated. It is also true that in poor and backward countries like India it is the main task of social reconstruction to raise quite considerably the people's standard of living. But it would not do here or elsewhere to apotheosise material happiness and encourage an outlook on life that feeds on an insatiable hunger for material goods. There can be no peace in the minds and hearts of men, nor peace amongst men if this hunger gnaws at them continuously. That would necessarily set up an uncontrolled competition between individuals, groups and nations. Everyone would be trying to outdo his neighbour and every nation not only to catch up with other nations but to leave them all behind. In such a restless society violence and war would be endemic. All values of life would be subordinated to this over-mastering desire for more. Religion, art, philosophy, science would have to serve that one aim of life: to have more and still more. Equality, freedom, brotherhood would all be in danger of being submerged in a universal flood of materialism. There would be no poise in human life, no real satisfaction because the possession of more would only whet the appetite for still more.

I am aware that there have been and are quite a number of socialists who have been aware of the danger of a purely materialistic view of life, but nevertheless the main concern of socialism has been and is with the material aspects of life. The socialist or labour parties and the trade unions do not educate the people about a balanced or whole view of life. If the socialist movement became conscious of the issue I am raising, its whole attitude

towards science, industrialisation, social organisation and international relations would be revolutionised.

Disciplining of the bodily appetites is essential for a moral life and the growth of the human personality and the blossoming of all human qualities and values. This is true particularly of socialist values. The socialist way of life is a way of sharing together the good things that common endeavour may make available. The more willingly this sharing is practised the less tension and coercion in society and the more of socialism. I believe that unless members of society learn to keep their wants under control, willing sharing of things may be difficult, if not impossible, and society would be bound to split into two divisions: (1) comprising those who are trying to discipline others and (2) comprising all the rest. Such a division of society always leaves the question open: who would discipline the discipliners, rule the rulers? The examples of the communist countries and the experience of socialist governments show that the answer to this perennial question is extremely difficult. The only solution seems to be to restrict as much as possible the need and area of disciplining from above by ensuring that every member of society practises self-discipline and the values of socialism, and among other things, willingly shares and cooperates with his fellowmen.

This brings me to the very heart of the problem of sarvodaya and socialism, party-and-power politics and non-party-and-non-power politics or *rajniti* and what Vinoba has aptly called *lokniti*.

I decided to withdraw from party-and-power politics not because of disgust or sense of any personal frustration, but because it became clear to me that politics could not deliver the goods, the goods being the same old goals of equality, freedom, brotherhood, peace.

But was there an alternative to politics? Could society be changed and reconstructed in any other manner than through the agency of the State? Politics is but a science of the State.

There was an alternative. Mahatma Gandhi had placed it before us. But, I must admit, it was not clear to me at that time.

Gandhiji had shown us an alternative to armed conflict in the course of our struggle for freedom. And we had followed him—not so much out of conviction as because his prescription had

worked. Nothing succeeds like success—as the saying goes—and Gandhiji's satyagraha campaigns were topping successes in that they stirred up the people and roused them to action as nothing had done before. All competing programmes and ideologies had to accept defeat and take a back seat.

But Gandhiji had no time to give a practical demonstration of his non-violent technique for changing and reconstructing society. No doubt, he had spoken and written much about it, but before he was able to put it into practice he was cruelly snatched away from our midst. Looking back, it seems clear now that he had already begun to lay the foundations of his future course of action. But the significance of what he was doing was entirely lost upon me, as perhaps upon many others. The significance of the fact, for instance, that after having led the freedom movement to a brilliant success, he did not take power himself to use it for remaking the country in accordance with his ideals, had completely escaped me. Likewise, when he proposed that the Congress should withdraw from the field of politics and turn itself into what he called a *Lok Sevak Sangh*, the import again of that extraordinary proposal was lost upon me. Nor had the country a chance to consider that proposal dispassionately, because the grief and anxiety into which it was plunged were too overpowering for clear thought. Besides, all eyes were turned to those who, in the absence of the ship's captain, were expected to steer her to safety. And from them not a word came about the Master's "last will and testament". On top of it all, when it was seen that every one of Gandhiji's political colleagues had taken to the traditional path of politics, it could not even be suspected that there was in Gandhism an alternative to the method of party and power.

A question might be raised here why it should ever be suspected that Gandhiji, who had devoted his whole life to politics, should have at all thought in terms of an alternative to it. In my humble opinion Gandhiji never had anything to do with politics in the sense I am considering here. The movement for freedom that Gandhiji led was "political" in the sense that its goal was the national independence of India; it was not "politics" in the sense that it was a struggle for power for any particular party. If its aim was power, it was power for the entire Indian people, including those who separated to form Pakistan and for all the

parties that existed, or were to be formed in the future in both Indias. Gandhiji was not a party leader fighting and manoeuvring for power for his party. Had it been so it could never have occurred to him to ask the Congress to quit the field of power politics. He was a national leader fighting for the freedom of his country: nay, he was a world leader of humanity working to free his fellowmen from bondage. The Indian freedom movement was a people's movement par excellence. It was not *rajniti* (politics of the State) but *lokniti* (politics of the people).

Be that as it may, the questions raised by politics kept humming in my head, leaving me dissatisfied and urging me to seek an alternative. The party system, with the corroding and corrupting struggle for power inherent in it, disturbed me more and more. I saw how parties backed by finance, organisation and the means of propaganda could impose themselves on the people; how people's rule became in effect party rule; how party rule in turn became the rule of a caucus or coterie; how democracy was reduced to mere casting of votes; how even this right of vote was restricted severely by the system of powerful parties setting up their candidates from whom alone, for all practical purposes, the voters had to make their choice; how even this limited choice was made unreal by the fact that the issues posed before the electorate were by and large incomprehensible to it.

The party system as I saw it was emasculating the people. It did not function so as to develop their strength and initiative, nor to help them establish their self-rule and to manage their affairs themselves. All that the parties were concerned with was to capture power for themselves so as to rule over the people, no doubt, with their consent! The party system, so it appeared to me, was seeking to reduce the people to the position of sheep whose only function of sovereignty would be to choose periodically the shepherds who would look after their welfare! This to me did not spell freedom—the freedom, the swaraj, for which I had fought and for which the people of this country had fought.

Democratic socialists had no doubt talked vaguely of decentralisation of power, of the four-pillar state and of other similar concepts. But in practice I found that their entire concern was, as still is, with the capture of power. They seem to believe that even decentralisation of power was possible only after the present centres of power had been conquered, so that decentralisa-

tion and de-institutionalisation could then be legislated into being. They do not see the absurdity of this procedure. Decentralisation cannot be affected by handing down power from above to people who have been politically emasculated and whose capacity for self-rule has been thwarted, if not destroyed, by the party system and concentration of power at the top. Today village panchayats are being established according to laws made in the *Vidhan Sabhas*.¹ These are not true panchayats, not what Gandhiji understood by *gram raj*. In Gandhiji's pregnant words the panchayat "can function only under a law of its own making." This capacity to self-regulate the life of the community must be created and not bestowed from above in the name of decentralisation. The process must be started from the bottom. A programme of self-rule and self-management must be placed before the people, and by a constructive, non-partisan approach they must be helped to translate it into practice. It is clear now that it was in order to undertake such a programme on a nationwide scale that Gandhiji was thinking of converting the Congress into a non-partisan *Lok Sevak Sangh*. It is exactly this task that Vinobaji has undertaken. Naturally, he did not have the lead in the race that Gandhiji would have had, but it is remarkable that in the brief span of six years he has succeeded in creating a movement of social revolution and reconstruction from below as well as a new band of *lok sevak*s to assist in the process.

As a way out of the faults and failures of the party system, I toyed for some time with the idea of a cooperative, rather than a competitive, system of parties. I realised, however, that in the first place, there was no climate for such a political experiment, and in the second place, the experiment could not succeed within the given framework of struggle for power and the system of parliamentary democracy, except for limited purposes and limited periods. I still believe, however, that given the psychological climate for it such a political experiment might yet be made. But for that the frame of reference will have to be changed from parliamentary democracy to something different. Be that as it may, my disenchantment with the party system kept on urging me to seek a better substitute for it. Gandhiji's non-partisan constructive approach towards people's self-rule seemed to offer one hopeful line of exploration.

¹ State Assemblies.

As questioning about politics was not confined to the party system alone, fundamental questions arose in my mind as to the place and role of the State in human society, particularly in relation to the goals of social life that had fixed themselves before me. Perhaps my schooling in Marxism, with its ideals of a stateless society, made these questions more pointed and troublesome. Though I had given up the basic postulates of Marxism, because they did not promise to lead me to my goals, I continued to feel strongly that human freedom could be fully and wholly realised only in a stateless society. I was, and am, not sure if the State would ever wither away completely. But I am sure that it is one of the noblest goals of social endeavour to ensure that the powers and functions and spheres of the State are reduced as far as possible. I became at this time, and still am, an ardent believer, like Gandhiji, in the maxim that that government was the best that governed the least. The test of human evolution for me became man's ability to live in amity, justice and cooperation with his fellowmen without outward restraints of any kind. That is why I have considered the human and social problem to be at bottom a moral problem.

With this conception of the role and place of the State in society at the back of my mind, I viewed with very deep apprehension the march of the State to greater and greater glory. Democratic socialists, communists, as well as welfarists, (not to speak of the fascists), are all statist. They all hope to bring about their own variety of the millenium by first mastering and then adding to the powers and functions of the State.

The bourgeois State had monopoly of political power. The socialist State threatens to add to that the monopoly of economic power. Such a great concentration of power would require equal, if not greater, power to control and keep it in check. There would be no such power at hand in a socialist society. Paper constitutions could hardly be expected to guarantee freedom and sovereignty to the citizen. The economic and political bureaucracy would be so strong and in occupation of such vantage points that the liberties and rights of the people, as well as their bread, would be entirely at its mercy.

I am aware that democratic socialists are conscious of these dangers and are trying to devise "checks and balances." The independent trade unions are supposed to be a great bulwark of

freedom, though it is recognised that the great trade unions are themselves becoming more and more ridden with bureaucracy. Plans for industrial democracy and public accountability for State enterprises have been drawn up. Consumers' associations and cooperatives of all kinds are rightly supposed to function as balancing and restraining factors. Even decentralisation of authority and functions has figured of late in socialist thinking. But after all is said and done the democratic socialist State remains a Leviathan that will sit heavily on the freedom of the people.

The only remedy for this that I could think of took me farther away from politics and towards sarvodaya. The remedy obviously is, as I have said above in the context of internal and external discipline, to make it possible for the people to do without the State as far as practicable and to run their affairs themselves directly. Speaking as a socialist, I would put it thus: the remedy is to create and develop forms of socialist living through the voluntary endeavour of the people rather than seek to establish socialism by the use of the power of the State. In other words, the remedy is to establish people's socialism rather than State socialism. Sarvodaya is people's socialism. Whether every socialist agrees or not with sarvodaya, he should agree that the more of people's or voluntary socialism and the less of State-enforced socialism, the fuller and more real the socialism. Unfortunately, there are very few socialists who are giving much attention to people's socialism. Speaking of British socialists, Jack Bailey, the British Cooperative leader says: "In Britain the concentration of most socialists upon the capture and use of State power has tended to blind them to the validity of non-State forms of socialism." (Quoted by Harold Campbell in *Socialist Commentary*, July, 1957). What is true of Britain is true of all the world. It should be obvious that in order to develop non-State forms of socialism, it should be unnecessary for any one to function as a party or to engage in a struggle for the capture of power. Both power and party have no relevance in this context. What is needed rather is a band of selfless workers prepared to live and move in the midst of the people and help them to reorganise their lives on a self-reliant and self-governing basis. One cannot help being reminded here of Gandhiji's *Lok Sevak Sangh* again.

The question now arises, what will be the form of that society in which it will be possible for the people to run their affairs directly and develop all those values of life that characterise a socialist society : cooperation, self-discipline, sense of responsibility? This is a question to which socialists have paid the least attention so far. Human society has so grown that we have the complex industrial civilisations of today, with great human forests that are called cities, with economic and social relationships that are utterly impersonal and non-lifegiving, with modes of work that are irksome and bereft of joy and opportunities of creativity and that have the sole criterion of productivity and efficiency to recommend them. Science has turned the whole world into a neighbourhood, but man has created a civilisation that has turned even neighbours into strangers. Such a complex and top heavy society cannot but be a heaven for bureaucrats, managers, technocrats, statisticians. Such a society cannot be a home for brothers to live together as brothers. Socialists, in the name of science, production, efficiency, standard of living and other hallowed shibboleths have accepted this whole Frankenstein of a society—lock, stock and barrel—and hope, by adding public ownership to it, to make it socialist. I submit that in such a society the very breath of socialism would be hard to draw. Self-government, self-management, mutual cooperation and sharing, equality, freedom, brotherhood—all could be practised and developed far better if men lived in small communities. This is beginning to be realised by forward-looking thinkers even in the West.

Further, man is a product both of nature and culture. So for his balanced growth it is necessary that a harmonious blend between the two is affected. This blending, in spite of parks and green avenues, is not possible in such centres of modern civilisation as London, Paris, New York, Moscow. As a result, modern man's development is warped and onesided. A harmonious blending of nature and culture is possible only in comparatively smaller communities. Let me quote Aldous Huxley from his *Science, Liberty And Peace* :

Now it seems pretty obvious that man's psychological, to say nothing of his spiritual, needs cannot be fulfilled unless, first, he has a fair measure of personal independence and

personal responsibility within and toward a self-governing group, unless, secondly, his work possesses a certain aesthetic value and human significance, and unless, in the third place, he is related to his natural environment in some organic, rooted and symbiotic way.

It was for these reasons that Gandhiji insisted that the Indian village and village self-government (*gram raj*) were the foundations for his picture of society—the society of equal and free human beings living as brothers in peace.

Living in small communities and producing mostly for self or local consumption on small machines may be regarded by some as setting the hand of science backwards. Science and centralised large-scale production and large conglomerations of human habitations are thought to go necessarily together. Nothing could be more absurd. Science is of two kinds: (a) pure science and (b) applied science. I would call pure science alone science and the other technology. Now, the application of science does not depend upon science itself but upon the character of society. Large-scale, big machine production was profitable to the money makers, so technology took the course of that particular type of production. The money makers were the dominant class in society and their will had to be done. Governments also—irrespective of ideologies—preferred centralised, big-scale production, because that was necessary for war making (or defence, if you please), and—no less important—because it also concentrated great economic, and, therefore, political power in their hands. Thus governments and profiteers combined to create the Frankenstein of modern society. Poor science had no say in the matter. Rather, had the scientists had their way, many of them, I believe, would be happy to smash many of the engines of production and destruction that their discoveries had helped to create. But suppose society had pursued not the aims of power, profit and war, but of peace, goodwill, cooperation, freedom and brotherhood, science could have been equally applied to evolve the suitable technology. If that were to happen, it would be not regression of science, but progression in a creative rather than destructive direction. It should be pointed out that atomic energy has made more possible than ever before the dispersal of production and the development of small technology,

that is, technology appropriate to production in small units and by small-sized machinery. Let me quote Huxley again :

My own view, which is essentially that of the decentralists, is that so long as the results of pure science are applied for the purpose of making our system of mass producing and mass distributing industry more expensively elaborate and more highly specialised, there can be nothing but ever greater centralisation of power in ever fewer hands. And the corollary of this centralisation of economic and political power is progressive loss by the masses of their civil liberties, their personal independence and their opportunities for self-government. But here we must note that there is nothing in the results of disinterested scientific research which makes it inevitable that they should be applied for the benefit of centralised finance, industry and government. If inventors and technicians so chose, they could just as well apply the results of pure science for the purpose of increasing the economic self-sufficiency and consequently the political independence of small owners, working either on their own or in cooperative groups, concerned not with mass distribution, but with subsistence and the supply of a local market. The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath : and the same is true of applied science.

I am not suggesting that the whole picture of this new society is clear to any one or that all its problems have been thought out and resolved. How, for instance, would these small self-reliant, self-governing communities be related together is a major question that immediately springs to the mind. There is, of course, Gandhiji's grand conception before us :

In this structure, composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual, always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance, but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

Gandhiji's words give us direction, but much thought and experience will be necessary before the picture becomes more clear. However, one warning must be sounded. While it is undoubted that life in small communities, permitting and promoting personal relationships, will be more suited to the realisation of sarvodaya ideals, it should not be imagined that small communities, by virtue merely of their size, will necessarily be sarvodaya communities. Had that been so, we would have encountered sarvodaya in every village of India today. The outward forms of living have relevance only when the inward forms are given. Men must understand and accept the sarvodaya view of life before they can proceed to investigate in what environment and social framework they could live that life best.

The fear is often expressed if self-reliant and self-governing communities will hold together and the unity and integrity of the nation will abide. In a sarvodaya world society the present nation States have no place. The sarvodaya view is a world view, and the individual standing at the centre of Gandhiji's oceanic circle is a world citizen. But let us leave for the present the world picture of sarvodaya. There is no reason to suppose why self-governing small communities will be hostile to one another or isolationist or selfish in their inter-relationship. If the internal life of a community is laid on sound foundations, its external life cannot but be equally sound.

IV

The Dynamics of Sarvodaya

During Gandhiji's life time, in spite of the fact that I was gradually drawing close to him, as I have recounted above, I could not see how this non-violent technique could bring about a social revolution. I had seen how that technique worked during the national revolution, but how feudalism and capitalism could be abolished by the same means and a new society created was not at all clear to me. I had, no doubt, read Gandhiji's writings on revolution through change of heart. But in the absence of a direct demonstration, those ideas seemed impractical in the extreme. During my Marxist days, I had written a vehement critique of the theory of trusteeship;¹ and though I had moved considerably away from Marxism by the end of Gandhiji's life,

¹ In *Why Socialism?* (1936).

I was not prepared to accept that trusteeship could be a social, as distinguished from individual, norm of behaviour. As I have indicated above, Gandhiji, soon after independence, was evolving in his mind a national programme for launching upon the second and greater phase of his unique career. His proposal to transform the Congress organisation which he had fashioned as a non-violent army of freedom into a *Lok Sevak Sangh* was no doubt a bold stroke of genius. But as I have said earlier, its significance was entirely lost upon me. So, having already rejected the use of violence under democratic conditions as counter-revolutionary, I was naturally left only with the traditional socialist methods of bringing about the social revolution. At the same time the gaping inadequacies of that method and the poor quality of the results achieved through it—some of which I have discussed above—put me in a questioning mood.

I was in this frame of mind when an event of great significance took place. In a remote village of Telengana, *Bhoodan* was born. My first reaction to the event was of the usual sort: it would take hundreds of years in this manner to redistribute all the land in the country, I thought. But there were two factors in the situation which arrested my attention and forced me to give it serious thought. One was the author himself of *Bhoodan*. I had known Vinoba for years and often when I had occasion to visit Wardha, I went specially to see him. I always found him unusually stimulating and original. Some of his writings that I had read had an exhilarating freshness. I recalled how Gandhiji had selected him as the first satyagrahi in 1941. I remembered again his clear-sighted lead at the first conference of Gandhian constructive and political workers convened at Wardha after Gandhiji's death. When a person like Vinoba, I thought, had started something, it could not just be brushed aside as a stunt or futile gesture. The other factor was the steady growth of the movement. It was found that whenever and wherever a serious band of workers took it up, it produced results. The method was not impractical. It appeared that if as much effort was put behind it as behind the usual political movements, the results would be far quicker and sounder.

About this time, the old Socialist Party had decided that it should turn its urgent attention to the question of redistribution of land which it considered to be the most vital question of

economic reform before the country. In a resolution on this subject which I had sponsored, the Pachmarhi Party Conference [1952] had made a brief reference to *Bhoodan*, welcoming it and promising support. Some time afterwards, I went to see Vinoba when he was in the Banda district of U.P. to discuss this question of land redistribution. I saw that he was serious about the problem and his economic outlook was revolutionary in a basic way. I decided to join Vinoba's movement. But I had a three weeks' fast impending, which completed, I plunged into the bhoodan "Ganga" in the Gaya district of Bihar. My brief experience was exhilarating beyond expectation. Within a week nearly seven thousand acres of land were obtained as gifts—most of them spontaneous and from small holders—announced at my meetings.

As the movement progressed it took on new forms. Already in 1952 it had disclosed an aspect which was startlingly attractive. In the village Mangroth of the district Hamirpur in U.P. *gramdan* had been announced. Vinoba has a great talent for coining words and investing old words with new meanings. Thus *dan* in his vocabulary does not mean gift, but "sharing together". That is his rendering of Shankar's definition, *danam sam vibhagah*. *Gramdan* was equitable sharing together of the lands of the village by the people of the village. *Bhoodan* signified distribution of land to the landless, *gramdan*, on the other hand, meant communisation of the land: institution of community, in place of individual, ownership of land. It became evident that *Bhoodan* had within it the germ of total agrarian revolution.

And how beautiful a revolution, how different from all others! Private ownership of land (including *zamindari* and peasant proprietorship) has been abolished in other ways in other countries; namely, by the compulsion of law or direct physical violence. The social resultants of these "revolutions" have been uniformly unhappy—such as bitterness and hatred; misery and tyranny; growth of an agricultural bureaucracy and reduction of free peasants to the status of serfs; concentration of power and dictatorship. In the beautiful revolution of *gramdan*, ownership was not abolished by force of any kind, but freely surrendered to the community. The outward social change was accompanied by inward human change. It was an example of what Gandhiji meant by a double revolution. In place of social tensions, conflicts and tyrannies, there were freedom and mutual goodwill

and accord, making it possible for an unprecedented output of free collective initiative and endeavour. (It may be remarked parenthetically that production of food grains in Mangroth has trebled in the course of a little over four years.)

A little after the announcement of Mangroth *gramdan* I made a special trip to the village to see for myself what had happened there. What I saw opened a new vista into the future. It was thrilling to visualise the great moral, economic, political and social revolution that would sweep over the country if Mangroth were repeated in every village. And I could find no reason to suppose that what had happened in Mangroth could not happen in all the villages of India. The people of Mangroth were by no means angels.

In due course Vinoba added a new item to his programme: *Sampattidan*. On a superficial view it appeared that this was another trick for raising contributions. In reality it was the beginning of a programme of converting proprietorship (not only of land but of all property) into what Gandhiji called trusteeship. *Sampattidan* demonstrated that the methodology of the new revolution was not restricted to the problem of land, but could be applied to the entire social field.

Vinoba's movement thus supplied an answer to the question that I had long been asking: could Gandhiji's philosophy offer a practical method to accomplish the social revolution? In a brilliant extension and development of Gandhiji's work, Vinoba demonstrated that there was such a method.

As I see it, it is a two-pronged method. One prong of it is a mass campaign of what Gandhiji termed "conversion". In other words, a widespread campaign is launched to persuade men—irrespective of class, creed and other differences—to give up those ideas, ways and values of life that have been found to be wrong and harmful and to accept in their place certain others. Thus a revolution in ideas and values is set in motion. At the same time, the new values and ideas are so chosen that they have a direct bearing on some major social problem and their acceptance and practice are expected to lead to a solution of that problem and incidentally to a radical change in society. The change, let it be emphasised, takes place as a result of individuals beginning here and now to live the values of the future society. Other revolutions failed because those who brought them about used means

that were inconsistent with their ends. For instance, if the end was a stateless society, the means were the coercive powers of the State itself; if the end was brotherhood, a fratricidal war amongst brothers, called class-war, was the means used; or, again, if the end was rooting out of selfishness as the driving force in life, the selfishness of certain sections of society was used as the driving force for the social revolution. In the sarvodaya method of revolution the ends and means become one. If in the new social order property is to belong to society and the property-owner is to be a mere trustee, the revolution begins by individuals converting themselves here and now into trustees.

Another important feature of the method is that though the new ideas and values appear difficult to practise, a phased programme is so contrived that even ordinary persons are able by easy steps to advance towards the seemingly difficult goal. To illustrate, Vinoba through his movement is propagating the idea that we are only trustees of "our" properties and therefore entitled to no more than what society gives us as our share. Therefore, he is exhorting us to live as trustees and share what we have with others. In the present circumstances, this appears to be a very difficult road to travel. Therefore, Vinoba has made the pilgrim's journey easy by asking him first to share only a small part of his possessions. Even this should have been difficult for the individual if he were asked to do it alone. The moral life is difficult to live in the midst of immorality. It requires greater effort and higher moral resources. But when all around one are making a similar effort, it becomes easy even for weak characters to raise themselves. Therefore, the programme of "conversion", though directed to the individual, has a mass character; that is to say, whole groups and masses of men are sought to be touched and moved by it.

The other prong of the method is to devise a programme of self-help and self-government through which men—first those living in small communities—may learn to manage their own affairs and, moved by the new ideas and values, cooperate together to create new institutions and forms of social life. To illustrate, side by side with *bhoodan* there is the programme of production for self and local consumption; of *gramdan*, which is a new agrarian economic order; and of *gramswaraj*, which is village self-government. The revolution in ideas as represented by

Bhoodan, *Sampattidan* and *Gramdan* and the revolution in the outward organisation of society represented by community ownership of land and community self-government together constitute a full revolutionary programme that is different both from revolutions of violence and revolutions made by law.

This is a new technique of which the world has had no experience yet. It is common for new ideas to be treated with suspicion and reserve. But for us in India who have had the privilege of witnessing the miracle of national freedom being won with radically new ideas and methods, which too had been met first with doubt and derision, it should not be difficult to appreciate the new ideas and methods of Vinoba that are after all in the nature of an extension and development of the earlier ones used by the Father of the Nation. We in India have also the additional privilege, as one of the youngest nations of today, of being in a position to benefit from the successes and failures of others.

After the achievement of freedom it was perhaps natural for public spirited persons to rush towards the newly conquered seats of power in order to be able to serve the country, but I hope in the last ten years there has been enough experience accumulated about the inadequacy and futility of service through power for large numbers of patriotic individuals to rally under the banner of sarvodaya. Already hundreds of *satyagrahi lok sevaks* have rallied to that banner. There is need for hundreds of thousands of such.

V

Conclusion

I hope it can now be seen why I decided to withdraw from politics. I hope also that it will be appreciated that it was not a negative decision. It was not the ugliness of politics that repelled me, but the attraction of the new politics of sarvodaya that drew me. For, as I have tried to show above, sarvodaya also has its politics. But it is politics of a different kind : politics of the people as I have called it, as distinct from the politics of party and power, *lokniti* as distinct from *rajniti*. The politics of sarvodaya can have no party and no concern with power. Rather, its aim will be to see that all centres of power are abolished. The more this

new politics grows the more the old politics shrinks. A real withering away of the State!

I should add that there can be no question of any hostility between *rajniti* and *lokniti*, nor can the two be kept apart as two unmixable castes. *Lokniti* is but the child of *rajniti*. Between the two there must be constant contact and cooperation. Democratic *rajniti* cannot possibly ever resist the idea that the people should practise self-government as far as possible. All democratic parties should, by definition, be prepared, nay, anxious to hand over power to the people as soon as possible, in the same manner as every good father is anxious to hand over to his sons when they are of age. If pressure of work permits me, I shall try some time later to place before the country my humble suggestions in regard to the evolution of our polity from *rajniti* to *lokniti*.

I should also add that though all my energies would be bent towards developing *lokniti*, I shall not shut my eyes to what happens in the sphere of *rajniti*. For good or ill, *rajniti* does to some extent influence the lives of the people. It shall be my concern from the outside to see that that influence is as salutary as possible. I am aware of the risks involved in that, the risk, for instance, of being misunderstood and charged with "playing politics". I would regret very much if anything like that happened. But perhaps one cannot always avoid misunderstandings in public life. I wish, however, to assure everybody that for my part I cannot but view every issue from a detached non-partisan point. If my intervention at any time causes annoyance to any one, the misfortune will be entirely mine.

PART THREE

RESHAPING OF INDIAN DEMOCRACY

1953

16. The Challenge to Democracy*

DEMOCRACY has had a long and chequered career. Its origin perhaps was in the natural urge in man towards self-rule. That is why from primitive times man has attempted to establish different types of self-government. But there are other human urges which have interfered with this urge to self-rule and so the existence of democracy has always been precarious and its evolution slow and fitful. While there is a natural urge in man towards freedom, he seems to desire this freedom for himself rather than for his fellowmen. There also seems to be a selfish urge in man which leads him to acquire wealth and power and position for himself. This sets in force a movement counter to democracy. Thus there is a perpetual conflict between the forces of democracy and those opposed to them. This conflict will perhaps continue till human nature becomes so refined that man comes to value the freedom of his fellowmen as much as his own.

Modern democracy grew up in Western Europe and, while its development enlarged human freedom in the countries of its birth, economic inequality, exploitation, unemployment and imperialism always dogged its forward steps. In Western Europe the problem of economic democracy yet remains to be solved. And as far as imperialism is concerned, we are yet witnessing the strange spectacle of democrats of the imperialist countries suppressing and trying to destroy the democrats of the dependencies. Thus man, after two hundred years of democracy in the

* Talk broadcast by All India Radio.

West, is faced with the challenge of capitalism and imperialism. That challenge has to be squarely met if Western democracy has to become a real democracy.

Asian society is backward economically and socially and feudalism is typical of the social order in Asia. The tasks of democracy are naturally far greater in Asia than in the West. No doubt it is possible for us to take advantage of the lessons of Western democracy and we may start at the point which the West has reached after two hundred years of democratic experimentation. But that will not make our task very much easier. We may copy the present forms of Western democracy and skip all that painful process of slow evolution, but nevertheless in substance we would remain as backward as we are. Substance creates form, but not form substance. The challenge to democracy in Asia comes most from this backwardness. And here totalitarianism comes forward as an attractive alternative.

Totalitarianism claims not only to establish economic democracy by abolishing at one stroke feudalism and capitalism, but it also promises to develop rapidly the backward economy of Asia. Nor can it be said that the achievements of totalitarianism in these respects are inconsiderable. Therefore, the appeal of totalitarianism is real. If democracy is to survive in Asia, it must prove its superiority in solving the problems of economic inequality and exploitation as well as those of economic development.

In our country while we have copied the form of Western democracy, we have not shown yet that Indian democracy is capable of handling these problems with speed and efficiency. The prospect of democracy in Asia becomes gloomier when it is realised that even in the West, where democracy has had longer innings, the problem of economic inequality and exploitation has yet to be solved. I have no doubt that the Indian people, if given a choice between democracy and dictatorship, would choose the former, because Indian culture has always respected the individual and his freedom. But no people, no matter how strong their faith in freedom and democracy, will accept for long, particularly in these revolutionary times, a social system in which hunger and misery are the lot of the many and wealth and happiness the fortune of the few. This will be still more

difficult when the people will have before them the attractive alternative presented by communist totalitarianism. Therefore, it is the urgent duty of all those who believe in the values of democracy to work for an immediate transformation of the present social order.

Democracy in Europe was able to keep in check the forces of social revolution because industrial growth and imperialism enabled it to raise the standard of living of the common people. Democracy in Asia has no such opportunities and, therefore, it cannot afford to imitate the ways of the West in this matter. Economic development and raising of the standard of living would be a slow process in Asia. In the meanwhile, the forces making towards equality and the abolition of exploitation cannot be denied their full expression. Therefore, unlike Europe, in Asia the priorities will have to be reversed. Economic development and prosperity came first in Europe and it was after 150 years that the process towards economic equality was set in motion.

In Asia, it is the latter process which must come first; otherwise democracy would never be able to stand up to the forces of totalitarianism. As far as I have been able to understand, those who are in power in this country today are trying to do just the opposite and want to imitate the European development. All the emphasis today is on production. The question of distribution receives only a passing reference. I see in this the germs of the destruction of democracy. This, as I see it, is the challenge to democracy in our country. Unless this challenge is squarely met, it is certain that democracy would perish.

Let me add that if this challenge is to be met, and the foundations of economic democracy are to be laid here and now, the present shape of our political democracy will have to be transformed. There is no pattern in the world today of economic democracy which we would be able to copy. From the village upwards to New Delhi and from bullock-farming to the major industries, forms of self-government will have to be evolved which will form essential parts of our democracy. Economic democracy cannot be a function of the service, even that of a specially created economic civil service. The producers, agricultural and industrial, manual and intellectual, must play the main part in this democracy.

This is not the occasion to dilate further on this topic. I have drawn attention to it now merely to indicate the scope of the answer that need be given to the challenge of democracy. I do fervently hope that those who serve the nation will have the courage to face honestly this challenge of the age.

1958

17. Back to Mahatma Gandhi*

IN the past few days I have been placing a few ideas before the country and they seem to have stirred up a little controversy and, I hope, also a little fresh thinking. But I am afraid my references to partyless democracy have diverted attention from my more urgent suggestions. The suggestions I have been making are of two types : those that are for immediate action and those that are for long-term application. My ideas about partyless democracy are of the second type and in due course I shall place them before the country in a more considered manner. I have, however, placed two suggestions for immediate action and I wish to plead again for their urgent and serious consideration.

I discovered on my return from abroad that in the few months that I had been away the mood of depression and the sense of failure had deepened. There may be brave partisan words uttered in Parliament and elsewhere, but there is no doubt about the existence of this mood, which is more prevalent in the Congress Party, not excluding its topmost ranks, than elsewhere. Apart from the mood and the sense of failure, there are the hard facts staring us in the face. Even the primary problems such as those of food and unemployment have not been solved in eleven years of independence. Partisan politicians do no doubt try to solve this situation by acrimonious verbal warfare, mutual mud-slinging and what is termed as *satyagraha*.* The constructive outcome of all this is wholly out of proportion to the time and energy—both physical and psychological—expended on this sort of thing.

* Statement issued to the press after return from a tour of Europe and Western Asia.

Undoubtedly, there have been and are faults in Government policies, but even the best of policies will not by themselves yield the results that are universally desired.

I am not aware of any instance in history in which a country was developed only by the efforts of the State. This is true both of the democratic and totalitarian States. Without the massive participation of the people it is impossible for any nation to be built up. I should like to put every possible emphasis on this statement, because it is to my mind the crux of the present situation in this country.

This simple fact unfortunately was not realised by the leaders of the country when the reins of government were handed over to them. They fondly imagined in their hour of success that having inherited the might of the British Government they could do whatever they wanted. It was only Mahatma Gandhi who was not swayed in the least by success and who saw clearly that the real power to do things was with the people and that, therefore, it was necessary to go to the people to arouse them to action. It was for that reason that he was thinking of converting the mighty Congress organisation of those days into what he termed a *Lok Sevak Sangh*. As time rolls by, the wisdom and foresight of the Nation's Father become more and more impressive. Now, even the most power-drunk ruler of the country has come to realise that in the absence of what is termed "public co-operation" all official effort turns out to be rather a damp squib.

India's greatest asset is her thirty-seven crores of people. But, when these crores remain inert and unmoving, they become India's greatest liability. When, however, they begin to move, the most gigantic tasks of national reconstruction will become child's play. The most important question before the country, therefore, is not how to strengthen the government or who should succeed the Prime Minister, but how to awaken to action the sleeping Leviathan—the three hundred seventy million people of this country.

The totalitarian systems have perfected methods to mobilise the people behind official programmes of development. These methods, alas, are not available to the democratic systems. And democracy is too valuable an article to be sacrificed for anything. If national reconstruction requires suppression of democracy, it is misleading to call it national reconstruction. The latter

includes both material and moral reconstruction. Suppression of democracy signifies moral degradation of the people which cannot by any standard of definition be termed national reconstruction.

In India we have made democracy the foundation of the nation's reconstruction. The question, therefore, is how within the framework of democracy the people can be mobilised for action. This question is further complicated by the situation in which the people of this country find themselves. I believe firmly that the people of India are basically no different from the people of Germany or Japan or China. But a long period of foreign rule has atrophied them completely. They are in the position of the fractured human limb that has just emerged from the encasement of plaster. It takes long care and exercise to rehabilitate the atrophied limb. The Indian people too have to be rehabilitated by a long period of guidance and help.

The experience of the past eleven years has shown that long-distance appeals of the leaders of the nation from their seats of power have failed to move the people. Experience has also shown that the usual game of party politics has also failed to interest the people. On occasions infinitely small sections of the people have been aroused, not so much for purposes of national reconstruction but for those of agitation and partisan campaigning. It is also patent that the civil servants and the machinery of administration cannot activate the people. They lack the moral authority, the intimate touch and the missionary zeal that are necessary.

How then can this supreme task be accomplished? The answer in the fewest possible words is: "By going back to Mahatma Gandhi." The leaders of the country must come out of the dream that political power alone would do the trick. They must go to the people—to live and work with them, to serve, guide and help them. They must do all this not to strengthen their parties and gather votes for themselves, but in order that the people should rise and put their heads and hearts and hands to the tasks of national development. If this programme is to be effective, if it is to produce the necessary psychological impact on the nation, it would be essential for the very topmost leaders to come forward to head this mass movement. It should not be difficult for them to prepare a concrete non-partisan programme of reconstruction with which to go to the people. Vinobaji's

programme is already there. Something could be added to it or a new programme could be drawn up. It would then be necessary, in order to make this movement effective, to mobilise hundreds of thousands of voluntary workers. I have not the least doubt that if the leaders were to take this revolutionary step and were to appeal to the youth of the country they would soon have more volunteers than they would be able to put into action. I feel certain that in the space of five years such a movement could completely revolutionise the situation in the country, lift the people from the depths of depression and set millions of hands to action. Furthermore, such a movement would also have a great corrective influence on the administration and the government as well as on public and private life in general. I am quite clear in my mind that if democracy is to be saved and reconstructed in India and if the nation is to be developed there is no alternative today.

There is another suggestion that I have made for immediate action. This concerns the other side of the medal of national life. My reading of the situation in the whole of Asia has led me to the conclusion that the people of this great continent have only two alternatives before them: that of democratic socialism and totalitarian communism. I should say parenthetically that I regard sarvodaya as a finer and truer form of social democracy. I have found that from Cairo to Djakarta the ruling political climate is that of democratic socialism. The necessary political instruments, however, for the establishment of a democratic socialist society appear everywhere to be weak. In India, the democratic socialist forces are tragically divided and disorganised. The Congress Party pays allegiance to democratic socialism, though it is questionable how strong the socialist convictions of that party are. However, the party must be taken at its word. Then there is the Praja Socialist Party which too is pledged to democratic socialism. There are also small groups which profess the same ideal. I have, therefore, suggested that all the parties that profess democratic socialism should sit round a table to find out what they mean by that term and to what extent they agree, not so much in theory but in practice, about what needs to be done to create a democratic socialist India. If nothing else came out of such a mutual discussion, at least there would be one useful result, namely, everyone would know what he was talking

about and where he stood. I personally feel that there is every possibility, if everyone approached this task with humility and an open mind, of a fairly large area of agreement emerging. I suggest then that the parties that are able to come to such an agreement should agree further to work together the common programme, reserving the right to propagate their respective viewpoints regarding matters where agreement had not been reached. I suggest that if this is to be done the initiative must come from the big brother, that is, the Congress Party. I understand that talks are going on between all the political parties in India for agreement on a minimum code of conduct, such as eschewing violence and non-exploitation for political ends of students and labour. I heartily endorse this move and wish it all success. But something much more radical than that is called for today. I fervently hope therefore that the two suggestions I have made above will receive the serious consideration of all concerned.

1959

18. Building up from the Village*

EVERY institution of society grows out of its own peculiar soil and is nourished and nurtured by its own unique climate and environment. While borrowing has been a common means of social development, no borrowed institution can thrive unless it is properly acclimatized and integrated. During India's long history her institutions have acquired a certain character that is uniquely Indian. A way of life has developed that, in some subtle manner, is cast in an Indian mould. An attitude of mind has grown that again operates in a peculiarly Indian framework.

The evolution of India's social institutions has had a chequered history. Foreign invasions and administrations have turned and twisted the native currents of development. But the hidden springs of Indian life have been powerful enough to reassert themselves and pierce through the over-lain layers of foreign institutions and ways of life. The 'age of saints', *sant-yuga*, as it is called in Hindi, represented just such a reassertion during the period of Muslim domination. Nanak, Kabir, Tulsi, Tukaram, Ramdas and the other saints of that time endeavoured to dig up the buried treasures from under the debris of a shattered civilization. Likewise, during the British period, the line of spiritual teachers from Raja Ram Mohan Roy to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi represented the rebirth of India and the reassertion of her vital springs of life.

The present political and administrative institutions of India are foreign transplantations. In planting these institutions (or

* Talk broadcast by All India Radio.

their precursors) on Indian soil, the British paid no regard whatever to India's own political patterns, ancient or contemporary. After the end of British rule, the fathers of the Indian Constitution, including the politicians and the experts, again paid no heed to India's traditions and the deep-flowing springs of Indian life. The result, to say the least, has not been happy.

British democracy is relatively of recent development. When the East India Company was chartered, there was no democracy in the British Isles. Democracy there began with the conflict between Prince and Peers. Later the conflict broadened into one between the commercial and landed interests, broadening British democracy further. The Industrial Revolution stimulated this development as the new middle class fought and gained a share in the political power. The rise of the working class movement led to further extension of the frontiers of British democracy and the establishment of adult franchise and full representative government.

Present Indian democracy is the product of the conflict of politically and economically conscious elements in Indian society with British imperialism. The Indian people, particularly the masses, did not struggle to establish the existing institutions of democracy, though they did take part in the movement for national independence. Adult franchise, for instance, is not the result of the struggle of the masses for the precious right to vote. Vast numbers of them do not appreciate the value of that right nor understand how to use it. This makes democracy, based on adult franchise, unreal and insubstantial.

Was, or is, there any alternative? I am sure there is. And the extraordinary thing is that Gandhiji, the architect of our freedom, the Father of our Nation, had taken special pains to point out that alternative. But just as Indian history was neglected, so was Gandhiji's clarion call.

Every one has heard of the ancient village communities of India. True, there is not much known about them, but much more is known than the anthropologist's jaw-bone or femur from which he constructs the whole creature and even speculates about the culture that it might have created. Indian and foreign historians have discovered enough information about the ancient Indian villages for us to know how they constituted the most

stable foundations of Indian society that withstood all upheavals that took place in the country. Dynasties rose and fell, wars were lost and won, invaders came and went away, but through every political turmoil the village community stood like a rock, carrying on its life and running its affairs in its appointed manner. Much that has remained in India of lasting value and merit is attributed by historians to this stability of Indian society provided by the ancient village organizations. At different times and in different areas there were small federations of these self-governing communities that functioned for several centuries. North of this ancient city of Patna where this talk is being recorded was the famous republic of the Lichhavis of which the Buddha spoke and of which even the powerful Magadh empire had to be careful. These republics, no doubt, had the character of clans, but they were democratic clans and conducted their business according to accepted laws and rules of procedure.

The self-governing village communities were the foundation stones of ancient Indian polity. Their strength came from within and not from without. Their authority rested not on rights and powers granted by a central authority, but on the willing consent of the families that constituted them. The powers they wielded and the functions they performed were far wider than those of the village panchayats of today, which are mere empty shells as compared with their ancient predecessors. Professor A. S. Altekar in his *State and Government in Ancient India* sums up the powers and functions of the ancient village communities in the following words :

They (i.e. the village communities) made effective arrangements for the defence of the community, collected the taxes of the Central Government and levied their own, settled village disputes, organised works of public utility and recreation, functioned as trustees and bankers, raised public loans to mitigate the miseries of famines, organised schools, colleges and poor houses and arranged for their funds, and supervised the manifold religious and cultural activities of the temples. There can be no doubt that they exercised greater powers than those that are at present enjoyed by the local bodies in most countries, both of the East and of the West. They played an important and creditable part in defending the interests of the

villagers and in promoting their material, moral and intellectual progress.

When we look at the atomised, backward, listless villages of today, it seems incredible that there should have existed at one time such powerful village communities. This ancient tradition of democracy should have provided us with a far surer basis than anything we could borrow from elsewhere. Even what we borrowed could be fitted properly into the body politic of the country only if it were built around the ancient tradition. It is true that our Constitution emphasises the programme of establishing village panchayats, as the lowest units of local self-government. It is also true that in recent years State Governments, with the support and guidance of the Centre, have taken active steps to speed up this programme. But, as I have said just now, these newly formed panchayats are like empty shells. Whatever authority they have has come to them from above, so that they represent more the intrusion of centralised power into the village than the flowering of Gandhiji's *gram rajya*.

How the atomised village of today that has no collective will of its own and is completely at the mercy of selfish and exploitative interests can be integrated into a real self-governing community and made a stable foundation of Indian polity is to my mind the most important question of national reconstruction.

To fulfil this task a revolution is needed in our thinking both about the village and the nature of human society.

It is possible to discern three different views on the future of the Indian village. One regards the village as an out-dated institution that is condemned to eventual extinction. The second also regards it as out-dated, but realises that (a) agriculture must be carried on and (b) urbanization, no matter how rapid, cannot find room for every one in the town. Therefore, according to this view the village has to be preserved in order that food and certain essential raw materials for industry may be produced. This view is even generous enough to advocate the 'development' of the village. However, in this view the village continues to remain a junior partner and poor helper of the town which represents civilization, progress, modernity, science.

There is the third view that regards the village as the natural and sensible habitat of man and the primary unit of social

organization. Man is a social animal and it is necessary for the full development of human nature that the primary community in which he lives is such that he is able to establish personal relationships and live his life in meaningful association with other members of the community. The towns and cities are human jungles where impersonal relationships govern the life of the individual, who is compelled to quench his thirst for 'society' by forming such artificial things as clubs and other associations. In the city neighbour does not know neighbour and there is no living together. Life is divided into compartments and, like passengers on a railway train, men are thrown together with different men into different compartments of activity one after another: now into the factory, now into the big apartment house, now into the theatre and so on. This is not living together. This is not human society.

There is another vital consideration that I should like to stress in this connection. There are certain values of life which civilized man upholds and desires to make the basis of individual and social behaviour. Now, because man must live in society, it is reasonable to demand that at least the primary community in which he lives is such that it facilitates the practice of those values.

For instance, let us take the value of cooperation. It is universally agreed today that in this age when the means of destruction have acquired such overwhelming power, men must cooperate together in order to survive and enjoy the fruits of science. Even Russia and America are forced to think in terms of cooperation.

Now, if the human race has to develop cooperation within itself, it is necessary that man learns to live cooperatively in the community in which he lives. This is possible much better in the small community than in the human jungles that are the large towns and cities. True, there are all manner of cooperative societies in the cities of Europe and America. But surely they do not represent cooperative living. They again make compartments of life and now the individual cooperates as a consumer and now as a producer. Not only does this sort of cooperative compartmentalise life, it also impersonalises it. The joy of cooperation is in the human relationship that is established between those who cooperate, rather than in the economic advantages it offers to

the members of a cooperative society. True cooperative living is possible only in a small community where personal relationships can be formed and life can be lived together.

In Indian religious tradition there are two types of worship or devotion. One is called *sagun* and the other *nirgun*. The first may be translated as the manifest God and the second as the unmanifest. Religious teachers have said that worship of the *sagun* God is easier than that of the *nirgun*. Likewise, cooperation in the abstract with individuals whom one does not know is far more difficult and requires much more powers of intellectual perception than cooperation with persons whom one knows and with whom one lives. It may be urged that even in the big cities such cooperation can be possible, but it will be cooperation of the compartmental type and not cooperation between whole men.

If I had more time, I could have taken up other human values and shown how the small organic community is a far better nursery for them than the large agglomerations of inorganic individual men. There is one set of human values that can obviously be practised far more meaningfully in a small community than in a large one. I mean the values of democracy. There can be true people's democracy only in such a community. It is true that the small democratic communities will have to be integrated into the larger democracy of the Nation, and eventually into the international democratic community. But the true foundation of democratic life can be established only in the small primary community.

A serious objection may be raised to this whole way of thinking. The obvious trend all over the world, it may be pointed out, is towards urbanization and the extinction of the small community. This is undoubtedly so. In India too urban population is growing at present at the rate of thirty-five lakhs every year. But I do not conceive of man as a helpless victim of fate or the so-called forces of history. Man is endowed with reason and intelligence and he can order his life as he likes. There is nothing inherent in science that drives man to huddle together in huge, monstrous inhabitations. The drive towards cities has certain economic, social and political causes. These are not eternal and can be changed by conscious human effort. There is no doubt that if the village remains as it is today, the trend of urbanization cannot be checked. But if it is accepted that human society must

be constructed on the foundation of small primary communities, the villages of today can be converted into habitations attractive enough from every point of view for no one normally to wish to desert it. When Gandhiji said that if the Indian villages died, India would die, he made it emphatically clear that he was not thinking for a moment of preserving the villages as they are at present. They have indeed to be changed radically, but yet they will retain the characteristics of a small community that I have tried to describe before.

Life both in the city and village is at present unbalanced and unsatisfying. For a proper balance agriculture and industry must be carried on together in an inter-dependent and complimentary manner. There may be exceptions for reasons into which we need not go at present, but the predominant character of the primary communities must become agro-industrial. The present hiatus between town and village must go and an entirely new type of community must be created. The virtue of the Indian village is that it is a ready-made basis for the construction of the agro-industrial communities of the future.

I might add that there need be no limit to the use of science in the agro-industrial communities, except the limits placed by the accepted human values. Science is often represented as an independent force of nature to which man must adjust himself. This appears to me to be wholly wrong. It is not man who has to adjust himself to science, but science which has to be adjusted to human ends. Indeed, this is what is exactly happening, but the human ends are usually the unworthy ones. What I am pleading for is the application of science to worthy human ends.

Having talked at some length of the village as the foundation of Indian democracy, let me now turn to the consideration of the superstructure that must be raised above it. The concept of State that we have adopted in our country is what Salvador de Madariaga, the Spanish political philosopher, has variously described as arithmetical, mineral or inorganic. The State is conceived of as an 'arithmetical sum of individuals'. Every adult citizen has his individual vote and the arithmetic of these votes, sometimes very complicated by electoral laws and party systems, governs the functioning of the State.

This is contrary to the nature of human society and the social nature of man. According to this view the State is an integration

of political institutions. The primary political institution is naturally the primary community, the village, with its appropriate political organs, including a council. The village council would deal with all local matters and would possess the maximum power and initiative in regard to them.

It would be natural for a number of these villages or municipal councils to be integrated together in an area council covering a large or small area as the circumstances might dictate. These area councils will be concerned with the local problems of their area and will be fully competent to deal with them. The area councils may be integrated in a district council and so on till we reach the national parliament, which will be the integration of the state assemblies.

It would be wrong to think that this view of the democratic structure merely replaces the present system of direct elections with indirect elections. It is not a question of a system of election. It is rather a question of the conception of human life and human society. It is only this conception that explains why we must build up from the village, why the village itself should undergo a radical transformation if it has to be made the foundation of our democracy, and why not individual voters but living communities and their upward integration should constitute the State. I am convinced that if the present structure is maintained, not only would the village wither away and become even more shadowy, but our democracy too would remain suspended in the air without roots in the soil and the life of the people.

1959

19. Reconstruction of Indian Polity*

IT was nearly two years ago, some time after the Mysore Gramdan Conference [1957], that I had occasion to discuss with certain eminent political leaders the question of indirect elections. I had found a very favourable response and was encouraged to put down my ideas on paper.

Public work in India is so wasteful of time because of its utter lack of system, and my own habits of work are so unsystematic that I had not been able until now to do this.

The ideas and proposals herein expressed are in the nature of tentative suggestions to serve as a basis for discussion.

While I have been influenced a great deal by Gandhiji's ideas on the subject, I should like to make it clear that what follows is not bound to any particular ideology or school of thought.

First of all, it is necessary to emphasise that the issue before us cannot be narrowed down merely to that of a better electoral system than the present one. The issue is a much more comprehensive one, namely, that of the nature of the polity most suitable for us at this juncture. Further, it is also necessary to remember that polity, whatever its nature, does not function in a vacuum, but has to fit into the larger social entity and subserve the larger social purpose.

I propose in this paper to 'describe the main outline of the polity which to my mind is not only most suited for us, but is also

* Abridged version of paper published by the Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh (Kashi) for private circulation.

most rational and scientific, with a brief statement of the reasons for my views.

I have pleaded for our present political institutions to be based on the principles that had been enunciated and practised in the ancient Indian polity, because (a) I believe that would be in line with the natural course of social evolution and (b) those principles are more valid from the point of view of social science than any others.

Present Western polity is based upon an atomised society, the State being made up of an inorganic sum of individuals. This is both against the social nature of man and the scientific organisation of society. Ancient Indian polity was much more consistent with these both.

Let me make clear that this paper is not a treatise on democracy or government. I am dealing here with a practical and immediate question: what should be the principles and form of Indian polity at the present time.

I have not looked at this question from the point of view of any ready-made preconceptions and have avoided giving any label to the views expressed here. Even the name, communitarian, was reluctantly used, because a descriptive term sometimes became unavoidable. My search here has been for the forms of social life, particularly of political life, that would assure the preservation of human values about which there is hardly any dispute in the world today; and my approach has been non-partisan and non-sectarian.

My colleagues in the sarvodaya movement might miss the word, 'Sarvodaya' in this paper. But I hope they will recognise that the goal of this enquiry is nothing else but the ultimate good and rise of all. At the same time, I should like to remind them that I have not been concerned here with the ultimate state of things, but with the next immediate step towards a better way of life. Furthermore, my enquiry has been mainly confined to the political field.

The general political situation in the country, the state of party organizations, the falling standards of public conduct, the partisan conflicts at a time when a common endeavour was called for have all combined to produce a pre-disposition in the public mind to bring a fresh approach to bear upon national and international questions. I hope the more, therefore, that the

prevailing questioning and experimenting mood would help further dispassionate consideration of the plea made here in all humility and earnestness.

On the very portals of democracy—irrespective of its form and structure—are words written that can never be wiped off, without wiping off democracy itself. No kind of democracy can exist without the democratic freedoms—freedom of conscience, of association, of expression—and the rule of law. Where these freedoms do not exist, nor the rule of law, there can be no democracy. For my enquiry here I take these words as axiomatic and inscribe them in bold letters on the doorway before entering the house of Indian democracy.

I

Some General Considerations about Democracy

It would be fatuous of me to try to give a definition of democracy. Nor is there need to do so. We have chosen democracy as our political ideal and are now concerned with the practical question of how to realise it. The general considerations that follow pertain to this question.

Perhaps it would be well, at the outset, to keep in mind that the ideal can never fully be realised in India or anywhere else. All that is possible is to approach the ideal as nearly as possible.

It is for this reason that many political writers narrow down the ideal considerably and advance a realizable definition of democracy. Consider the following from an internationally recognised political authority: “ ‘ Government of the people by the people ’, ‘ Government of the nation by its representatives ’, these are fine phrases for arousing enthusiasm and fashioning eloquent perorations. Fine phrases with an empty ring. No people has ever been known to govern itself and none ever will. All government is oligarchic: it necessarily implies the domination of the many by a few.”¹ Again the same author writes: “ The formula ‘ Government of the people by the people ’ must be replaced by this formula, ‘ Government of the people by an *elite* sprung from the people.”²

Consider again the following :

¹ Maurice Duverget, *Political Parties* (London, 1954), pp. 424-25.

² *Ibid.*

The extreme case of political democracy is that in which people govern themselves directly, making the laws, dispensing justice, and (although this is more difficult) carrying out or overseeing the administrative functions. But no such democracy ever existed, or ever will so long as men live together in large political units. Inevitably, then, political democracy must be translated into law and representative government. Democracy does not assume that the 'people' actually govern themselves, and its theory makes plenty of room for leadership. Democracy in Western usage stands for the free conflict of ideas and leaders, from among which the electorate makes a choice.¹

These are strong words from wise and learned authorities, but I doubt if they will serve for all times. It might be said that the farthest democracy has advanced in the West is elected oligarchy. Western democracy may, therefore, be called not democracy but democratic oligarchy.

It is questionable, however, if the 'people' will remain permanently satisfied with such a situation. It may also be asked if the world-wide totalitarian assault on democracy does not acquire a point and a relevance on account of the fact that the peoples of the democracies do not experience the glow and satisfaction of self-government.

It is further questionable if democrats of all times and climes, social idealists and thinkers, the spirit of man itself will ever remain satisfied with the current Western definition of democracy. Already, I believe, all these elements have combined—the thinkers, the idealists, the people, the spirit of man—to demand a more satisfying participating democracy. Indeed, it is my firm belief that to the extent to which democracy becomes truly participative, to that extent would the onrush of totalitarianism be stemmed and even rolled backwards.

Therefore, while bowing my head to scholarship and learning, and also while remembering that the ideal could never be fully realised, I am for ever pressing forward with the quest for democracy and for discovering the ways and means by which more and more people could govern themselves more and more.

Let me now turn, as a part of this quest, to the formulation of some general considerations about democracy.

¹ H. B. Mayo, *Democracy and Marxism* (London, 1955), p. 256.

First of all, let it be pointed out that the problem of democracy is basically, and above all, a moral problem. Constitutions, systems of government, parties, elections—all these are relevant to the business of democracy. But unless the moral and spiritual qualities of the people are appropriate, the best of constitutions and political systems will not make democracy work. The moral qualities and mental attitudes most needed for democracy are : (1) concern for truth ; (2) aversion to violence ; (3) love of liberty and courage to resist oppression and tyranny ; (4) spirit of co-operation ; (5) preparedness to adjust self-interest to the larger interest ; (6) respect for other's opinions and tolerance ; (7) readiness to take responsibility ; (8) belief in the fundamental equality of man ; (9) faith in the educability of human nature.

These qualities and attitudes are not inborn in man. But he can be educated in them and trained to acquire and practise them. This task, let it be emphasised, is beyond the scope of the State. The quality of the life of society should itself be such that it inculcates these values in its members. The prevailing social ethics, the family, the religious and educational authorities and institutions, the example that the *elite* set in their own lives, the organs of public opinion—all these have to combine to create the necessary moral climate for democracy to thrive. Thus, it should be clear that the task of preparing the soil in which the plant of democracy may take root and grow is not a political but an educative task.

While the above moral qualities and attitudes have been treated in the abstract, without reference to any particular society in space or time, I should like briefly to deal with one particular moral attitude that seems to be peculiarly relevant to the fate of democracy in modern society.

The present is *par excellence* a materialist age ; and whether it is capitalism, socialism or communism, it is the material values that overshadow all other values of life. Man is a mixture of matter and spirit—to use these words in their popular sense—and every man has material needs that have to be satisfied. In that sense every man cannot help but be a materialist. But if the material needs become unlimited and the over-riding activity of mankind becomes an unending endeavour to satisfy the insatiable hunger for more and yet more, there is an imbalance established in human affairs and life becomes 'wholly materialistic. This is

exactly the situation in the West, in spite of its adherence, in large part, to Christianity, one of the noblest spiritual ways of life.

All this may appear to be irrelevant to the question of democracy. I emphatically hold to the contrary, because it seems patent to me that democracy cannot co-exist with the insatiable hunger for more and more material goods that modern industrialism—capitalist, socialist or communist—has created. I believe that for man really to enjoy liberty and freedom and to practise self-government, it is necessary voluntarily to limit his wants. Otherwise, the greed for more and yet more will lead to mutual conflict, coercion, spoliation, war; and also to a system of production that will be so complex as to bind democracy hand and foot and deliver it to a bureaucratic oligarchy.

It is undeniable that there is a conflict today between two values of life, namely, between wanting more goods and wanting more freedom. Those, however, who believe in freedom should have no difficulty in making the choice. In a poor country like India the masses may not yet be faced with this choice, but in the form of an ideal of life, the choice before India is as real as before Europe or America.

Which of the two choices India will make depends not upon Parliament or any type of political action, but, among other things, upon the example that the *elite* of society will set in their personal lives.

This issue of voluntary limitation of wants has another fundamental significance for democracy. In the democratic countries the cry is becoming stronger against the growing power of the State and against statism generally. This is a justifiable cry and democrats will have every sympathy with it.

Here we have perhaps the most difficult question that democracy faces today, the question as to how to resolve the following dilemma: when there is liberty it leads to abuse and necessitates State interference, and when there is State interference it leads to curtailment of liberty. How then to preserve liberty and prevent its abuse? There are no political means by which the dilemma can be resolved, there are only moral means. The obverse side of the medal of liberty is responsibility. If the individual is not prepared to take social responsibility, if he uses liberty for self-aggrandisement and neglects or hurts the interests

of others, some form of state-ism becomes inevitable. It is here that the pertinence and wisdom of Gandhiji's concept of trusteeship becomes evident. The only democratic answer to state-ism and totalitarianism is trusteeship. But trusteeship cannot be practised without voluntary limitation of wants. An individual cannot function as a trustee unless he is prepared to share his possessions with his fellowmen; this he cannot do unless he has learned to curtail his wants. Thus voluntary limitation of wants, in other words, the rejection of materialism or the unlimited pursuit of material satisfactions, is essential for the achievement and preservation of democracy.

Here we are likely to come up against the economists and their "science" of Economics. For it might be pointed out that the "laws" of economic growth cannot be by-passed, that economic development must take its natural course, that science and technology cannot be denied. But it is necessary to remember that present-day Economics is a science of a particular type of society which is ruled by a particular philosophy of life—the philosophy which we have just considered, namely, the philosophy of unlimited material progress. It is conceivable that there may be other 'sciences' of Economics, pertaining to other types of societies and ruled by other social philosophies.

It should be remembered that democracy does not consist merely in its formal institutions. It lives really and truly in the life of the people; it is a way of life. It is not only through the representative assemblies and elected governments that democracy works, but in an equally true sense through the voluntary associations and actions of the citizens which they carry on and establish to deal with their problems, promote their interests and manage their affairs. Professor Harold Laski, when asked how he would judge the worth of a democracy, replied that he would do so by the amount of voluntary activity within it. Democracy has worked best among peoples that have shown initiative and enterprise.

Democracy is not merely a question of political rights and people's part in government. Particularly since the First World War, democracy has come to mean more and more social and economic justice, equal opportunity, industrial democracy. The old distinction between political and economic democracy has been given up and the two concepts have been merged into one

to mean full democracy. This is not to suggest that democracy is bound up with any such politico-economic ideologies as socialism or communism. It is true that these ideologies had promised full democracy in the sense used above. But experience has shown that in the case of communism there has been not enlargement but a severe curtailment of democracy—both political and economic. The old belief that State ownership and management of the means of production, distribution and exchange will lead to economic self-government, elimination of exploitation and equitable distribution of the products of labour, a stateless order of society, has not been confirmed by experience. It is the very opposite that has actually happened.

In the case of socialism the position is somewhat better, because socialism preserves the institutions of political democracy. But it is questionable—and this has been recognised by socialists themselves—if concentration of economic power in the hands of a central State, even under democratic conditions, works for economic democracy; and, further, if it does not result even in the thwarting and limiting of political democracy itself.

It should, however, be pointed out, as it has been indicated above, that the fault is not so much with socialism, as with (a) the centralised State and (b) large-scale industrialisation.

In a centralised, unitary State the people are barred from participation in the government, even though they retain and exercise the right of choosing and dismissing it. This latter right too is substantially restricted by the operation of the party system, because it limits the choice of the people.

As for large-scale industrialisation, there is a very large measure of agreement among social thinkers that it inevitably leads to shrinkage of democracy.

But whatever the experience of the working of socialism or communism the fact remains that the concept of democracy does include social and economic justice, equal opportunity, industrial democracy together with all that is meant by political democracy. And if communism and socialism have failed so far to lead human society to these goals, the endeavour to reach them must continue to form part of the quest for democracy. It has been indicated above that the answer is moral rather than political or economic.

The problem of democracy is intimately connected with such social institutions and attitudes of mind as are represented by

the caste system and the practice of untouchability. A society in which men are considered high, low or untouchable according to the families into which they are born, is very far from being democratic. It is quite a different matter that individuals are endowed at birth with different abilities and aptitudes. That is a biological phenomenon, with which caste has nothing to do. It should be appreciated by every Indian democrat that the system of caste hierarchy and untouchability is the greatest and most stubborn enemy of democracy in this country. At the same time it should also be appreciated that vanquishing of this enemy is, again, not a political but an educative task. It is also, but to a much lesser degree, an economic task. The social stature of the depressed and backward castes will undoubtedly rise with improvement in their economic condition. But it would be a mistake to believe that economic improvement by itself would be sufficient to remove caste distinctions. The economically advanced castes too observe hierarchical distinctions among themselves.

In countries like India that have but recently emerged from foreign rule, the problem of democracy is further complicated by the fact of economic backwardness and the absence of recent democratic experience or tradition.

The problem of capital formation (which includes the problem of fixing the limits of present consumption and saving), the direction and utilization of labour and resources and similar problems of economic development are obviously capable of easier and quicker solution under dictatorship—communist or any other—than under democracy. This is one reason for the attraction that communism has for the intelligentsia of the backward countries.

Here the people of these countries are faced with a moral choice. Those who have chosen democracy have chosen the higher way of life and have shown that they are more developed as human beings than the others who sacrifice things of the spirit for material things.

On closer scrutiny it would appear that under dictatorships the people are compelled to sacrifice on rather false pretences. Neither in fascist nor communist dictatorships has it been found that the people were given the things for which they were made to sacrifice their freedoms. The economic development of the

countries under dictatorship aims at power rather than peace and prosperity. The standard of living of the common people in Soviet Russia—even after forty-two years of communist dictatorship and despite the phenomenal industrial and economic development—is lower than that of the U.K. or Sweden, considerably lower than that of the U.S.A. The standard in other communist countries is, of course, still lower, except perhaps in Czechoslovakia.

Incidentally, we have here the key to the understanding of the question of economic development of the backward countries under democratic regimes. If these countries also wish to build for power, they are doomed. Democratic India cannot compete with China at this game. She will either have to give up her democracy or face defeat in her attempt to build for economic-military power.

This is a crucial question for the new democracies to answer : are they going to build for power and war or for peace and happiness? Should the democracies depend upon military power for their defence or upon the forces of peace in the world and the moral strength of their own people? The least that is expected from a nation that calls Gandhi its Father is that it will refuse to build for power and will build for peace and happiness.

As for the second difficulty mentioned above in the building up of democracy in the backward countries, namely, the absence of recent democratic experience or tradition, it must be conceded that this difficulty is serious and real enough. Indeed, some consider it to be so serious as to apprehend the possibility of the rise of dictatorial regimes in these countries. The recent history of several Asian and African countries shows how justified is this fear.

The question may be asked, is there time to inculcate the values of democracy in the minds of the people? I personally feel that while the danger in India of a dictatorship, military or other, cannot be brushed aside lightly, there is no immediate cause for fear. But, even granting that the time is short and democracy is running a race against it for its life, what other guarantee there is for the survival of democracy except the people's intelligent appreciation of the values of democracy and their preparedness to fight for the defence of those values? The only other way to prevent a dictatorship from taking over is to forestall it by

setting up another dictatorship—perhaps a “democratic dictatorship;” that is to say, a dictatorship purposely established by those who believe in democracy in order to save their country from other types of dictatorships that deny the worth and validity of democracy. The dictatorship of Mustafa Kamal Atatürk which has now developed, outwardly at least, into a Western type of democracy and the two-party system may be cited as a good example of this. The present-day dictators from Cairo to Djakarta all profess to be building up democracy in their own dictatorial ways. While there is no need to distrust their motives, it must be admitted that for the time being at least—and no one can tell how long the interregnum will be—democracy has been given up.

In the case of India there are at least three factors of safety : (i) Due to the British connection, the intelligentsia, or a large part of it, was subjected to the influence of British liberal democracy, and later a smaller part of it to British social democracy. (ii) The struggle for independence, particularly because of Gandhiji's leadership, was instrumental in inculcating to some extent the values of democracy in the intelligentsia as well as in the masses. Gandhiji's influence is still considerable on the mass mind and is being reinforced by Vinobaji. (iii) Even though India has had no democratic traditions in the recent past, democracy had flourished for centuries in many parts of ancient India. This rich tradition could be drawn upon in order to build democracy in the present.

The danger considered above brings to the fore, among other things, the need to strengthen the base of democracy, so that even if something went wrong at the top, the base would endure and keep the foundations of democracy secure. This was the virtue of the village councils, the town committees, the trades and artisans' guilds of old. Kingdoms and empires rose and fell, conquerors came and went, but these organs of popular democracy, that drew their sanctions from the people of their own spheres and not from the central State, went on. Apart from the spiritual unity and way of life, it was these grass-root democratic institutions that have been responsible for the continuity of Indian society and culture. I deal below more fully with the question of building these basic structures of democracy.

Thus we see that democracy—to use an idiom of Mathematics—is a ‘function’ of so many factors, the resultant of so many

different activities. There is no single human or social activity by which democracy is created. The house of democracy has many mansions and many types of bricks, and various types of materials and builders are needed to construct it. It is a pity that this is not realised more widely in this country. Otherwise there would not have been such an obsession with politics and other activities could have been consciously undertaken for the building up of democracy.

II

Sign-Posts from the Past

It is well-known that the literature on the political and economic institutions of ancient and medieval India is rather scanty. Scholars, however, have gathered and pieced together enough material to give us a fairly reliable picture of ancient Indian polity.

I believe a study of this polity and of its relation to the whole ensemble of Indian life and culture should be useful, nay essential for the determination of present political institutions. Political thought has, of course, developed much farther since those days, and new political institutions, such as those of parliamentary democracy, have been fashioned. We must learn from this literature and experience. But the implantation of any idea or institutions that is not adapted to the native soil or grafted upon the roots of our life will not bear fruit or contribute to the organic and healthy growth of the body politic.

Indian society has passed through all manner of vicissitudes in the course of its thousands of years of history. But the spirit of India has persisted through them and the main stream of her life has flown uninterruptedly. At times, the stream disappeared underground, but as in the case of her many subterranean rivers, the limpid waters of India's inner life flowed unbroken under the inert sand of defeat and decline.

India is emerging presently from another of such melancholy periods of her history. Therefore, the builders of the future India should take care to explore the hidden founts of her eternal life and go to them for real sustenance. The political institutions that we build today should harmonise with the eternal spirit of India and nurture the founts that have kept her alive.

It may appear irrelevant to some to look to ancient India for sign-posts to guide us on the road to democracy. But India was

perhaps the earliest home of democracy and some of her republics had lasted as long as a thousand years. And though kingship or monarchy was the predominant form of Indian polity, kings in the earlier times were elected by and subject to the Kshatriya aristocracy. Even when hereditary kingship became the rule and the Samitis ceased to function, the village and town communities, the merchants' and artisans' guilds, the *varna* order, the *dharma*, or social ethics, continued to function independently of the central State—with which, indeed, the latter did rarely interfere—and to provide a stable, democratic basis for Indian polity. The democracy of the village communities was so stable and efficient that it continued well into the British period. Therefore, far from being irrelevant to the question of democracy, the ancient polity of India, particularly its underlying principles, should be of the utmost value to us in building up our democracy in the present.

'Community' and self-development and self-regulation of communal life are the distinguishing marks of ancient Indian polity. The State in India evolved through many forms beginning with the small Rigvedic 'kingdom' and developing into vast monarchical empires of the Mauryas and Guptas. In between there were aristocratic republics spreading over the Punjab, Sindh, Eastern U.P. and Northern Bihar. These were the *sanghas* or *ganas*. Other forms of State were known variously as *rujya*, *swarajya*, *bahurajya*, *dvirajya*, *vairajya*, *maharajya*, *samirajya*. But through them all persisted, and developed according to their own inner laws, the communal bodies. As these bodies were far more stable and enduring than the everchanging States, the latter, whether republican or monarchical, had little authority over them, apart from guaranteeing that they functioned properly within their own jurisdictions and according to their own constitutions and regulations. The State interfered with them only when they transgressed their own proper functions and procedures. There were very rare exceptions to this rule.

'Community' in ancient India had two forms. The first and basic form was the territorial community, the village or township. With the advancement of communal life, these came to be co-ordinated into larger territorial communities, sometimes embracing a whole Kingdom or republic. But their area never seems to have been very large.

The other form of community was the functional or occupational community, the *varna*. Just as it was natural for man to find communion with neighbours, so it was for him to find it among those who followed the same occupation, even if they were spread over wide, non-contiguous areas. Persons performing the same functions and following the same occupations, shared a common way of life and had common problems and common rights and common responsibilities towards the larger society. It was thus that the social genius of India developed the functional communities, the four *varnas* and gave them a theoretical as well as a practical form and basis. Each *varna* was self-determining and yet integrated with and responsible to the territorial community. The relationship of the individual with the two forms of the community and the inter-relationship between the latter two made up a remarkable, self-determining pattern of a complex ethico-socio-economic life.

The *varna* order of society has been so depraved and distorted that there would be few defenders of it now. Yet, the two fundamental truths of it are undeniable. That human beings have different aptitudes and abilities and every individual should be enabled to pursue and develop his natural gifts and inclinations are scientific truths that not only no one thinks of denying, but that every social scientist desires to make the basis of reorganisation of society. The second truth is voiced in one way or another by the various schools of functional democracy such as guild socialism, pluralistic State, occupational co-operation and others.

If our present political institutions are to be soundly based, if they are to draw sustenance from the Indian soil and, in turn, if they are to sustain, revive and strengthen the whole fabric of Indian society, they must be related to the social genius of India described above, and their texture must be woven again with organically self-determining, self-developing communal life, in which occupations, professions and functions are integrated with the community.

This is not only a question of constitutional forms or political systems. It is a creative question in the widest sense of the term. It is a question of an ancient country finding its lost soul again.

The old village communities have survived in nothing else than their physical existence. They are no longer living communities acting jointly for the solution of individual or communal

problems and for the development of their moral and material life. It is not necessary here to go into the story of the destruction of the village communities. It would be enough to note that it was the result of deliberate policy of an alien government that neither understood the character of communal polity nor felt secure in the presence of such strong traditions of self-government and self-help. Nevertheless, the very fact that the villages do exist physically provides us with a ready-made foundation to build upon. But we do not seem to be going about it in the right manner. *Gram panchayats*, no doubt, are being emphasised and established. But this is being done in an alien manner. The principles and methods that are being used will fail to infuse the spirit of community into the empty shells that are our villages today. Nay, they will atomise them yet further. I shall discuss this question more fully in the concluding portion of this paper.

A word that figures boldly on the ancient sign-post is *dharma*. Indian polity held that the State was subject to the *dharma*, which it was its duty to uphold and protect.

The concept of *dharma* was of great importance in ancient Indian society and it prescribed and regulated individual and group behaviour in all walks of life.

This concept of *dharma* and its role in Indian polity and the wider life of society is another example of that synthetic, organic, communal organisation of Indian society which has been discussed above. Communities, territorial or functional, had developed laws and codes of behaviour to regulate the internal life of their communities and groups and their relations with the rest of society. There were in addition codes and laws that were common to and accepted by all of them and that made up the universal social ethics. The ensemble of these social ethics exercised a powerful influence over the State.

Communal life having been completely destroyed, the roots of *dharma* have no soil from which to draw sustenance. *Dharma* has therefore declined and ceased to exercise any influence, not only upon present polity, which is a wholly foreign implantation and has no roots in the Indian soil, but upon all social activities, such as commerce, education, labour, administration, priesthood. Unless life in India is again organised on the basis of self-determining and mutually co-ordinating and integrating communities, that organic self-regulation of society which the

concept of *dharma* represented will not be possible. To that extent democracy will remain distantly removed from the life of the people. Vinobaji is already speaking, for instance, of a *gram-dharma* (the *dharma* of the village). But *gram-dharma* will not arise, as he has stressed, unless the village becomes a community. Only then will it be possible for the village to adopt as its *dharma* the welfare of all the villagers, so that none goes without food, clothing, a roof over his head, work to do; no child goes without a knowledge of the three R's; none goes without the benefit of a minimum health service.

The ancient concept of *dharma* has to be revived and the appropriate *dharma* for a democracy has to be evolved. This, as of old, will not be brought about by a legislative process. It can be done only in an organic manner: *dharma* must arise from life itself—life that is vital enough, real enough, organic enough to be able to throw up codes and laws for its internal regulation. The experience of recent social engineering may and should be drawn upon, but the main mould of life must be indigenous and consistent with the genius of Indian social organization.

III

The Social Nature of Man and the Community

Man is a social animal and is endowed with social nature. He is born in society, lives and dies in society. His nature makes him crave for "society", that is to say, for communion with other men. Every individual man is unique and has a distinct individuality, but his uniqueness and individuality have meaning and purpose only when he is a member of society. No man can live alone, or if he does, can have any human significance. He is then a freak of nature or an accident of life, he is beyond the pale of human society, he is not man. He is "wolf-man", or something of that sort, as his rare historical specimens have sometimes been called.

Further, the relation of the individual to society is not like that of the grain of sand to the sand dune. The relationship is rather like that of the living cell to the living organism. Man always lives in organic relationship with other men. It is the totality of these living relationships that constitutes society. Society is not a mere sum of separate individuals. Not even the crowd is an inorganic sum of human grains.

Modern Western democracy is based on a negation of the social nature of man and the true nature of human society. This democracy conceives of society as an inorganic mass of separate grains of individuals; the conception is that of an atomised society. The brick with which the present edifice of democratic polity is constructed is the individual voter and the whole process of democracy rests on the arithmetic of votes. The individual voter casts his vote as an atom of society, not as a living cell in organic relationship with other living cells. It is not the living together that is expressed and represented in the institutions and processes of democracy, but an abstracted individual.

It would be a pity if the peoples of Asia, who have such an ancient and rich heritage, should rush to imitate this inorganic polity. Happily, the evidence from Cairo to Djakarta indicates that Asian peoples are having second thoughts, and are seeking to find better forms than parliamentary democracy to express and embody their democratic aspirations. As far as India is concerned, Gandhiji had long ago pronounced parliamentary democracy to be a failure, and had advanced his own alternative proposals, which were at once so much more consistent with India's tradition and with the true nature of man and human society, and had expressed the hope that India might evolve a "true science of democracy" and give a "visible demonstration" of it.

The problem of devising the right kind of polity is obviously a part of the larger problem of social reconstruction. While it is true that in the past greed and other false values of life distorted or thwarted the working of man's social nature it is necessary now, when man is beginning consciously to re-order his life, to create economic, political and other institutions that are consistent with that nature. Modern industrialism and the spirit of economism that it has created, a spirit which weighs every human value on the scales of profit and loss and so-called economic progress, have disintegrated human society and made man an alien among his fellow men. Not only has the community been disintegrated, even the family is languishing in the West, and the mother, the woman, who was the centre and soul of the family, is losing her womanhood.

The problem of present-day civilization is social integration. Man is alone and bored, he is "organization man", he is man

ordered about and manipulated by forces beyond his ken and control—irrespective of whether it is a “democracy” or dictatorship. The problem is to put man in touch with man, so that they may live together in meaningful, understandable, controllable relationships. In short, the problem is to re-create the human community.

Let me now turn to the community. Territorial contiguity of a number of families, while it is the starting point and a most important condition, does not in itself make a community. The present-day Indian villages, for instance, are not proper communities. They were so at one time, but now are mere territorial settlements, life in them being individualistic rather than communal, mineral rather than organic. In the true community there is communion, i.e., sharing, participation, fellowship, as the dictionary puts it; there is identity of interest; a feeling of unity in the midst of diversity; a sense of freedom within the framework of accepted social responsibilities; differentiation of functions converging to the single goal of the good of the community and its members. Caste, class, race, religion, politics—all these divide men into different, often conflicting groups. The community brings them together, unites them and harmonises their interests. In the community agriculture, industry, capital, labour, skill, intelligence are not at loggerheads with one another, but are synthesised in the service of the community. Production and consumption are not two contra-posed sides of an economic bargain manipulated by distant agencies, but an integrated process serving a single and direct purpose. The community is built up of personal relationships, and choice and free will have their play within the limits of self-imposed discipline and common culture. In the community there is understanding participation by the members in all communal affairs. The community is a co-operative society, but the difference between it and the ordinary co-operative society is that co-operation in the community embraces the whole of life, rather than only its economic sector, and all the members of the community rather than only those who purchase shares. Every one in the community has a share in its fortunes and misfortunes. In its internal matters the community is self-regulating and self-determining. Division is poison for the community; so the endeavour always is to seek the highest common denominator.

It is interesting to recall here that in the Indian village communities there were no elections to executive offices on the present majority-minority pattern, which is a divisive and disruptive process. Instead there was selection by general consensus of opinion, or sometimes, by drawing lots.

I do not mean to say by all this that such a community as described above ever existed before, or that it would automatically come about if only people began to dwell in small territorial areas. Had it been so, all the Indian villages would have become ideal communities. What I do, however, wish to say, and say it with all the emphasis at my command, is that such a community must be the ideal of future social reconstruction. Only then will the social nature of man and the great humanist ideals of modern civilization find fulfilment. Only then too will there be true democracy.

For the heavily industrialised and urbanised countries of the West, this might be a difficult task—though many thinking Western minds are already giving their serious thought to it. But we in India—and I believe the same is true for other countries of Asia that have not passed under totalitarianism—are very favourably situated to launch upon this venture.

Before proceeding to consider the community further it may be advisable to deal briefly with the question of science and its impact on social organisation. It may be urged that small local communities might have fitted at one time into the rural pattern of life, but in this age of industrialism they have hardly any place except as odd specimens of a past civilization. Industrialisation and urbanisation, it may be said, necessarily go together.

I completely reject this view. The choice is not between urbanisation and rural life. The dichotomy between urban and rural is false and unscientific. Both industry and agriculture are essential for human life and its development. The question of industry should be looked upon from the point of view of the whole man: it should never be forgotten that industry is for man and not man for industry. Some people talk of science and technology as if they were like forces of nature, like an earthquake, let us say, about which nothing can be done except adjusting ourselves to it. Science and industry are products of the human mind and they should be bent to human purpose. Indeed this is what has already happened; only the human purpose has

not been an elevated and worthy one. Science and, its offspring, technology have been chiefly put to the service of private profit and power: the first represented by the capitalist system, the second by the modern centralised State, whether democratic or totalitarian.

It is common to call science neutral and amoral and to put the blame on man. The blame, of course, is there, but it is meaningless to call science neutral or amoral. Science, after all, is a product of purposive human endeavour; as such, it cannot be said to be morally neutral. If science does not conduce to human happiness and promote human values of life, it is not science but pseudo-science. The "science" that has led to the disruption of human society, to the alienation of man from his fellow human beings, to the creation of economic and political Leviathans and to man's increasing subordination to them, to man's automatization, must be rejected as false science and a new science and technology must be discovered to serve a better way of life. Commercialisation of science has to be replaced by humanisation of science; instead of science being exploited for power and profit, it has to be used for peace and happiness.

If man decided that instead of being herded together in large cities it was better to live in small communities, instead of being automatons it was better to be conscious human beings, instead of being a grain in the sand-heap it was better to be a member of a community, it should not be difficult for scientists to evolve the appropriate technology.

Thus the society we are visualising here will be neither "urban" nor "rural", it will be, if a name has to be given to it, communitarian. In other words, it will truly be society. Development of science has made it possible for the distinction between urban and rural to be abolished. The communities of the future will have a balance of agriculture and industry; they will be agro-industrial; they will make full use of science and technology so as to serve the ends of their life and no more. Owing to geographical and historical conditions agriculture may predominate in one and industry in another, but a balance between them will be the ideal of all. The present monstrosities, the big cities, will have to be decentralised as far as possible to relieve congestion and create healthy conditions of life; and for the rest, they will have to be so re-organised as to be made federations of smaller

sized communities. To the extent this is not possible, the big cities will have to be endured, care being taken to see that they do not become bigger, and no new big cities come up.

The question may be asked how large should be the local or primary community. There cannot be a cut-and-dried answer; there is no mechanical measure. The primary communities are organic growths and, depending upon many factors, their size varies. Let it be said that they should not be so small that a balanced development of communal life and culture becomes difficult, nor so large that life in them becomes impersonalised. The "revenue village" in India has a well understood definition, and even though it usually consists of a number of hamlets, all the inhabitants of them do feel a sense of belonging to one another. So in India the revenue village may be taken as the primary community. In States where the revenue village may be too large and an artificial unit, a new demarcation may have to be made.

We have so far discussed the local or primary community and shown how it is a creation of man's social nature and the unit with which the structure of society has to be built. Let us now consider how this can be done. Should society be just a sum, a totality, of the primary units? It should be obvious that such a society would be as arithmetic and mineral, or nearly so, as the one, like the present Western society, that is made up of the sum of individuals. Just as in the primary community a number of families come together and cooperate to build a common life, so in order that there may be society, the primary communities must come together and cooperate with other primary communities so as to tackle common problems and promote common aims. Such cooperation and coordination of activities will obviously be impossible between distant and very large numbers of primary communities: mutual intercourse is possible only between neighbouring communities. Therefore, the next step in the building up of an integrated society is for a number of neighbouring primary communities to come together and cooperate amongst themselves to build, let us say, a regional community. Each 'single primary community will do all that may be possible with its internal resources. But there will be many things that will be beyond the resources and competence of the primary community. For instance, each primary community

might be able to provide for a primary school, primary health services, small irrigation works like wells and village tanks, and village industries. But a number of primary communities must cooperate together in order to provide for a high school, an indoor hospital, a power station and servicing centre, larger industries, larger irrigation works, etc. Thus the regional community comes into existence by an organic process of growth. The circle of community is widened. It will be seen from this that the regional community is not a mere sum of the smaller communities constituting them. It is an integrated community in itself. In other words, at the regional level there is an integration of institutions and activities of the primary communities: the village panchayats are integrated into the regional panchayat; the village cooperatives into the regional cooperative union; the primary schools into the regional high school; the village youth and cultural associations into the regional ones; the village plans into the regional plan etc. Just as in its internal administration the primary community is autonomous, so in the spheres in which the primary communities have delegated their powers to the regional community, the latter is autonomous. (The need to delegate powers arises from the fact that the primary communities are unable by themselves to do everything that needs to be done). The regional community, however, is not a superior or higher body that can control, or interfere with, the internal administration of the primary communities. Each in its sphere is equally sovereign.

The regional community in its turn will do all that is within its competence. But, again, there will be many things which will be beyond its competence, such as running a techno-agricultural college, a major irrigation project, production of electricity, manufacture of machines, etc. In order that these tasks be tackled a number of regional communities will have to come together to form a still larger community—the district community, let us say. The district community too will be an integrated community and its relationship with the regional communities be of a pattern similar to that of the latter with the primary communities.

In this manner the district communities in their turn would federate together to form the provincial community. The provincial communities would come together to form the National Community. A day might come when the national

communities might federate together to form the World Community.

Two conclusions follow from the above. It should be obvious, in the first place, that as we proceed from the inner to the outer circles of communal life and organisation, there is less and less to do for the outer communities; so that, when we reach the circle of the National Community it has only a few matters to attend to, such as defence, foreign relations, currency, inter-state coordination and legislation. This being so, it should be obvious, in the second place, that such a social organisation offers the utmost scope for the people—who are no longer an amorphous mass of human grains but organised in self-governing communities—to govern themselves.

The communitarian polity that has been described above can alone guarantee the participating democracy which is our ideal and which should be the ideal of all democrats. It will only be in such a society that the individual will be able to save himself from the fate of robotism to which modern civilisation has condemned him and find freedom and self-significance as a member of the community.

IV

Shortcomings of Parliamentary Democracy

There is a formidable volume of literature on parliamentary democracy, including in the term systems akin to it, such as the American presidential democracy. There is also a vast literature on the party system which appears in the wake of this type of democracy.

I believe it would be fair to say that even the most ardent defenders of parliamentary democracy agree that it has serious defects. But they console themselves with the thought (a) that there is no better alternative; and (b) that, within limits, it is possible to amend and improve it. No one will deny that the system is capable of much improvement and it is undergoing change all the time, though not always for the better. But no matter how much improved, its fundamental defects will yet remain, because they are the very premises on which its entire structure has been raised.

The fundamental defect, from which other serious defects issue, is that this form of democracy is based on the vote of the

individual. We have already examined this situation and found that it is the atomization of society that is responsible for this kind of political system. But that does not alter the fact that the system is based on a false premise—the State cannot be an arithmetical sum of individuals. The people, the nation, the community can ever be equated with the sum of individual voters.

The partisans of parliamentary democracy claim that under it the government is at least representative of the majority of the voters, if not of the people. First of all, this is not true. More often than it is commonly believed governments elected under universal adult suffrage are minority governments, in the sense that they represent a minority of the voters. Wherever there are more than two parties, this happens quite often, but even under two party systems, it is not a rare phenomenon. At the last General Election in this country [1957], for instance, minority governments were established in a majority of the States, i.e., in seven out of the thirteen States, excluding Union Territories. In this way the "minority" States were: Bihar (Congress: 44.47%); Bombay (Congress: 48.66%); Kerala (Communist: 37.48%); Madras (Congress: 46.52%); Orissa (Congress: 40.01%); Uttar Pradesh (Congress: 46.29%); West Bengal (Congress: 49.20%).

It will not do to brush aside, as it has been done in this country, such serious anomalies and glaring defects in the parliamentary democratic system by the smug remark that such things are inevitable under a multi-party system. If such things are inevitable and if we are serious about democracy we must seriously set about to find a better type of democracy. The alternatives of plural constituencies, proportional representation, alternative vote cannot, even if there was general agreement about them, which there is not, take us far.

The claim that parliamentary democratic governments at least represent a majority of the voters breaks down in a still more serious manner. Experience has shown that present-day mass elections, manipulated by powerful, centrally controlled parties, with the aid of high finance and diabolically clever methods and super media of communication represent far less the electorate than the forces and interests behind the parties and the propaganda machines. It is not only in the totalitarian countries that the 'rape of the masses' happens. The basic difference is that in

a democracy there is a competition between the violators while there is no competition in totalitarianism.

Here we are face to face with another serious defect of parliamentary democracy—demagoguery. The need to 'catch' votes creates an unlimited opportunity for indulging in half-truths, even outright lies sometimes; for exciting the passions, more often than not, the base passions; for arousing false hopes by making dishonest, but pleasing promises. Hardly any issue of public policy is presented to the people in its true light; everything gets distorted by partisan demagoguery. The consequence of all this is that the real interests of the nation are sacrificed, more often than not, at the altar of demagoguery.

Perhaps the most serious fault of parliamentary democracy, from the point of view of democracy itself, is its inherent tendency toward centralism. At one extreme of its political spectrum is the national State and at the other the individual voter, with a blank in between. The local bodies that may exist have (a) little self-government powers, and (b) no direct or indirect influence on the national State. Add to this the complexities of a highly industrialised civilization that are beyond even the understanding of the ordinary citizen, and you have a central State of overwhelming power and resources and the individual voter reduced to abject helplessness. The 'sovereign people' being dispersed over the length and breadth of the country like particles of sand over the desert and having no other organised political force than the national State itself to interpose between themselves and that State, the latter naturally becomes all powerful. The issue of power in such a State is decided not by the fictitious 'people' but by a balance between political parties and such organized interests as industrialists and bankers and powerful labour unions. The people represent a wholeness, while the organised interests are sectional. Even a sum of the sections cannot make up the whole. Only their organic integration can do so. Such integration takes place only in the community—at its various levels. In the communal or communitarian democracy that we are advocating there are a natural decentralization and a multi-central pluralistic State.

A natural outcome of centralization of power and administration is bureaucracy. The central executive or cabinet is so overburdened with work that it is compelled to leave more and

more to, and depend more and more upon, the permanent officials, who in course of time gather more and more power for themselves. This soon leads to a dangerous autocracy, the autocracy of the bureaucrat, which is difficult to fight because it 'works in the shadows' and is hard to get at. The only answer to the problem of bureaucracy is more and more decentralization so that the people directly participate in the administration of their affairs and control the civil servants who owe their jobs and are directly responsible to them. This is exactly what will happen in the communitarian democracy outlined here. The communal administrations might make mistakes and there might be inefficiency. But as they themselves will be the sufferers, they will learn and improve things. Moreover, during the British rule did we not say to ourselves repeatedly that good government was no substitute for self-government? Is that less true now?

An inevitable concomitant of parliamentary democracy is the party system. So much has been written in criticism of this system that it seems unnecessary to dwell upon it here at any length. Some criticism of it has been implicit in what has been said above. It is clear that parliamentary democracy cannot work without parties. Parties of a sort will perhaps exist everywhere and at all times. Even in the family there may be 'parties'. In the ancient Indian republics, which were aristocratic democracies, parties and factions were a common feature. But the highly organized, centralised mass parties of modern times are a far cry from the factions of old, whether of the ancient Indian republics or the Greek city states. The old democracies were small and the factions and the people were not so far removed from one another. The people therefore could judge them and the issues that were raised with intimate understanding. The issues in those days were also simple enough. All this has changed now and parties have become a sort of state within the state. They are now the real arbiters of the people's fate, whose control over them is fictional. The citizens who cast their votes for the parties have nothing to do with the running of the parties: they are complete outsiders. Even the enrolled members of the parties have no say either in the policy-making or the inner administration of the parties. The parties are run by caucuses that are beyond democratic control.

Party rivalries, we have seen above, give birth to demagoguery, depress political ethics, put a premium on unscrupulousness and aptitude for manipulation and intrigue. Parties create dissensions where unity is called for, exaggerate differences where they should be minimised. Parties often put party interests over the national interests. Because centralisation of power prevents the citizen from participating in government, the parties, that is to say, small caucuses of politicians, rule in the name of the people and create the illusion of democracy and self-government.

No doubt the party system has its good points and because parliamentary democracy cannot work without it, those who swear by that type of democracy and see no alternative to it are prepared to accept the evils of the party system as inevitable and satisfy themselves by pointing out its virtues. For my part, it is not the party system that is the main culprit, but parliamentary democracy itself, which gives it rise. In the communitarian democracy that I have proposed here, there may conceivably be parties, but they are likely to be local factions, and, in any case, their role in the State will not be as commanding as that of the parties in the parliamentary system.

Another serious fault of parliamentary democracy is the system of election that it fosters and requires for its proper functioning. First of all, the system is very expensive and appallingly wasteful. The fabulous expenses involved have the effect of mortgaging democracy to moneyed interests or large sectional organizations such as trade unions. As compared with this the election expenses in the communitarian system would cost practically nothing.

It would have been a matter of some consolation if the huge expenditure had resulted in any public good. In fact, the result is just to the contrary. A general election, as noted above, creates unnecessary passion and excitement; instead of educating and enlightening the people it befogs their mind; instead of resulting in the election of able and good men, it tends to favour demagoguery. Serious political and economic issues and other questions of policy, it is obvious, should be considered calmly and dispassionately and not in the heat of partisan warfare. That is why I hold that the practice of general elections should be abolished. The elected houses should be continuous in nature, with a part of them being renewed periodically.

V

Economy of the Community

This is not the place to deal at any length with the Economy of the Community. For that a separate paper would be necessary. However, a treatment of the polity would be incomplete without a brief description of the economy that would underlie it. Society is a complex whole, as man himself is; and, therefore, social and human reconstruction requires an all-sided approach.

The aim of the community's economy is the welfare of the community and each of its members. Its aim cannot be individual profit, exclusive of the welfare of other individuals in the community. The community's economy is neither exploitative, nor competitive: it is co-operative and co-sharing.

The community comprehends the whole of man and is interested in his all-sided development. The life of the community is balanced and not one-sided. The economy of the community must, therefore, be subordinate to, and subserve, the aim of a balanced development of human life. Therefore, it cannot be an economy of unlimited wants, as it is in the existing society. The present 'science' of economics would be inapplicable to a balanced society. For it, a new science of economics will have to be worked out. In this country Gandhiji and Shri J. C. Kumarappa have laid the foundations of such a new economics.

The community is an enlarged family, and like the family it represents the eternal flow of life. Just as the family is interested not only in its present members but also in those who are unborn, so the community thinks of future generations. Its economy, therefore, is not wasteful. It is particularly careful about the non-renewable resources of nature which are being wasted at such a criminal rate by the so-called advanced nations of the world. A balanced economy concerned with future generations of men, that is, with life rather than death, would try to do its best to return to nature what it takes from it. It will, therefore, try to restrict consumption as far as possible to renewable resources and use as little as possible of the resources it cannot put back. The economy of the community is in co-operative harmony with nature, while present-day economy both of the West and East is at perpetual and destructive war with nature.

The economy of the community, further, should be as self-sufficient as possible. The idea of self-sufficiency, in this age of international trade, strikes many as parochial, isolationist, reactionary. But for the community it is most natural. The primary concern of the community is to provide for satisfaction of the primary needs of its members. It is, therefore, natural for it to produce all it can to provide for them food, clothing, shelter and other necessities of life. It is also the community's responsibility to see that every able-bodied individual in the community finds useful employment. But if the economic activities of the community are not primarily related to its needs, the community would be at the mercy of the market—not only national, but also the international market—which may spell unemployment and economic ruin for it. We have already discussed the effects of the atomisation of society and seen how modern industrial organization has made the individual a helpless human particle ruled by forces which he neither understands nor can control. Therefore, it was pointed out that the institutions and processes of society must be adapted to the human scale and man must be made the master of his fate. Following that line of thought we arrived at the communitarian way of life. But, if having reached the community, we again reverse the process and make it subject to the domination of macro-economics, we would find ourselves exactly where we started from. There would then be no other fate left for man but robotism.

Therefore, it is inescapable that in the economic sphere the community should, in the first instance, engage in activities that would be completely under its control. That is the sphere of production for self-consumption or consumption within the community. It is obvious that such production must, in the first place, be in the field of primary needs of life.

The community would obviously have other than primary needs. No community would be able to produce all that it needs. Even in the sphere of necessities of life, every community may not be able to produce all that may be required. No community can be self-sufficient in every thing. The question is how are those other needs to be satisfied?

The economic life of the communitarian society would be so organised that human needs are satisfied as near at home as possible: first, in the primary community, then in the regional,

district, provincial, national and international community—in that ascending order. This means that each expanding area of community would be as self-sufficient as possible. Incidentally, this would save much of the unnecessary energy and time devoted today to the business of commerce, advertisement, etc.

This would naturally set the pattern for planning. Planning would begin from the primary community and therefrom fan outwards. In our scheme of things the regional plan, i.e., the plan of the regional community, would be the pivotal plan. This would mean that the regional plan—and not the village plan, which would be too small for the purpose—would be the unit out of which the whole national plan would have to be constructed. The existence of large, unbalanced cities would complicate communitarian planning, and necessary adjustments would have to be made. The towns would, of course, be integrated with the regional, and district communities. But the integration of the cities would be difficult. It will be recalled that I have already suggested that as far as possible the cities should be re-constituted as federations of communities.

All natural resources would belong to the community. How they would be divided between the communities would be decided upon by common agreement. Generally speaking, each community would have possession of the natural resources that fall within its boundaries. But there are resources that are unevenly distributed such as forests, mines, etc. These would have to be shared by all by common agreement.

It follows that land would belong to the community; and, in the nature of things, each primary community would own the land that falls within its area.

Great economic inequality is inconsistent with community spirit. Up to a point difference in income or wealth may be tolerable. Vinobaji gives a homely illustration to drive this home. He gives the example of the five fingers of the human hand. They are unequal, but the inequality is reasonable; so that, in spite of it, the fingers can co-operate and work together. But if the difference had been too great, so that one finger was only a few inches long while the next was measured in feet, the hand would have been utterly useless.

In the community, the position of the worker would be central, because it would be realised that work is the most

essential thing required for the community. Without work the community could not exist. Therefore, every adult in the community would be a worker. At the same time, work would be a meaningful expression of human powers, rather than meaningless drudgery, because the worker would be a responsible participant in the work process. There would be no over-specialization tending to reduce the worker to an automaton. Rather, the agro-industrial nature of the communal life would make it possible for him to follow a diversified occupation.

A few words about the organization of industry, commerce, etc. I have already stressed the agro-industrial character of the communities—as opposed to purely agricultural or purely industrial. I have also stressed the need for a new kind of technology, adapted to the scale of man.

A social organization and technology of the kind proposed here would assure that the bulk of industrial and other economic institutions would remain confined within the region and district. There would be some institutions of provincial, and a few of national dimensions.

These institutions might be of the private, co-operative or communal type. In the primary, regional and district communities a large part, may be the greater part, of industry and commerce would naturally be of the owner-worker type. The rest would be co-operative or communal. A few units might be of the private employer-employee type. The provincial and national undertakings would be of the co-operative, communal or even private type.

Perhaps a word of explanation is necessary about the communal undertakings. They would be undertakings established by the communities and run either (a) by bodies set up for that purpose by the communities concerned, and working with full participation of the employees; or (b) by bodies directly set up by the employees themselves.

Self-government in industry, as in every other economic undertaking, would be a cardinal principle of the communitarian economy. In owner-worker units, the problem does not arise. Co-operatives formed only of producers also do not raise any problem in this regard. But in such undertakings, large or small, where there are employers, managers, technicians and workers—

no matter who the employer may be—a joint body representing all the elements would be set up for internal self-government.

The idea of classes at war with each other is foreign to the communitarian order of society and opposed to the spirit of community. That spirit requires harmonization of interests, which is possible only on the basis of faith, sharing and acceptance of responsibility—the cardinal principles of community life. It follows that such things as strikes and lock-outs would be foreign to the communitarian way of life. Non-co-operation might be a possible course of action in extreme cases involving moral issues.

Every economic institution, no matter what its type from the point of view of ownership, would be integrated with the community to which it territorially belongs. This means that its establishment and development would be in response to communal needs; that it would function according to conditions laid down by the community; and that it would be held responsible and accountable to the latter.

It means, further, that these institutions would also be organizationally integrated with the community. In the primary community, there would be no difficulty in integration—every institution would be directly integrated with the immediately present community. In the other communities some such pattern of integration as the following might answer the purpose. This, however, offers a wide field for experimentation.

In each communal area (region, district, etc.) each line of industry, or of other business, would be organised in an Association, representing owner-workers, other workers and owners, managers and technicians. That is to say, in each region, district, province and the country there would be different Associations of, let us say, iron-workers, carpenters, oil-men (or of their co-operatives), grain-dealers, factories making agricultural implements, batteries, etc.

These Associations would be federated in each communal area into an Economic Council. In this manner, each region, district, province and the country would have its own Economic Council. The Economic Council of every community would advise and be represented in the communal political body concerned (the *Panchayat Samiti*, District Council, etc.).

The Associations and Councils would have powers to make rules to govern their activities and those of their member institutions, provided these rules did not conflict with the rules and laws of the community. These Associations and Councils would be the modern *varna* organizations and their rules the modern *varna-dharma*.

A word about private enterprise. Private enterprise, in the sense of *purushartha*, the individual's spirit of enterprise, would have fullest scope in the community. But in the community the individual would be imbued with the spirit of community. Therefore, private enterprise in a communitarian society would also partake of that spirit and work for private as well as communal good. Further, private enterprise would also be subject to the principles of self-government and responsibility to, and integration with, the community.

It may be asked if all this would not conflict with the directive principles of the Constitution and the ideals of socialism to which our Parliament stands committed. On the contrary, I feel emphatically that it would be only in the kind of society described here that those principles and ideals could find fulfilment.

VI

Reconstruction of Indian Polity

It is time now to gather all the threads of the argument and tie them together. Ancient Indian thought and tradition; social nature of man; social science; ethical and spiritual goals of civilization; the demand of democracy that the citizen should participate in the ordering and running of his life; the need of saving man from alienation from himself and from the fate of robotism; the requirement that the State and other institutions of society be reduced to a human scale; the ideal, above all, that man should become the centre of civilization—all these point in the same direction: a communal or communitarian way of life; communitarian ethics and education; communitarian social, economic and political organization. In this paper I have been mainly interested in the political aspect of the matter: the shape of the political organization, or polity, most desirable for our country.

The foundation of this polity, as I have pointed out, must necessarily be self-governing, self-sufficient, agro-industrial,

urbo-rural, local communities. The existing villages and townships provide the physical base for such reconstruction. A laudable beginning has been made in this connection by establishing *gram panchayats* and instituting such programmes as community development; "intensive area" development (of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission); and co-operativization of rural economy. But from the point of view propounded in this paper these programmes suffer from several serious defects: (a) they lack an integrated social philosophy; (b) they have no clear concept of community; (c) they do not aim to create a balance within the community between agriculture and industry; (d) even though the aim is to create communities (no matter how vaguely understood) at the bottom level the concept of social organization at the higher levels remains the same as that of the atomised industrial society of the West (which for our purpose here includes Russia).

Let me deal briefly with each of these defects.

(a) The social philosophy, granting that there is one, behind the country's development programmes may be said to have two parts: (i) the philosophy of economic development; and (ii) the philosophy of democratic socialism.

No one in this country will question the need for economic development. But should that development be without limits as in the West (again, including Russia)? Should we develop our economy for power or for peace and happiness? Should "economism" rule over our lives or the need to develop the whole man? There is no need to repeat here what has already been said in this connection, but it is necessary to understand that the social philosophy motivating our development programmes at present is the same as rules Western (and Russian) society. That philosophy, as we have seen, is incompatible with the outlook of community development and the communitarian order of society.

As for democratic socialism, there seems to be no clarity of thought. Democratic socialism in the West has come to mean, in practice though not in theory, State socialism. And if it has any philosophy, it is that of welfare-ism from the top and not of a socialist way of life lived in every home and neighbourhood. If socialism and welfare-ism from above are to be the ideals of our social reconstruction, development of the community at the

bottom has neither any social significance, nor any chance of success. The base and the superstructure will contradict each other; and because the top will be all-powerful—as it must be under State socialism—the superstructure will undermine the base. It will be remembered that the Soviet system had started out to be something of a communitarian system, but because the top became all-powerful, the bottom was crushed out of existence. There are no true Soviets in Soviet Russia—there is one monolithic State.

As I have shown above, socialist philosophy need not be opposed to the communitarian picture drawn here. But in that case, the socialist will have to be less interested in institutions and more in man. The old faith that State ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange plus planning will bring about socialism has been falsified. In its extreme form that faith led to Stalinism. But a new faith has not been created to take the place of the old. For this the socialists will have to go to the pre-Marxian socialist idealists, the philosophical Anarchists; to Tolstoy, Ruskin and Morris; to the post-Marxian social idealists; to Gandhi and Vinoba. The “communities of work” of France have a great deal to teach the socialists; and so have the Kibbutzim of Israel and some of the *gramdan* villages of India. The socialists must also take from Marx what is still valid and from science the best it has to offer. This task will require a vast capacity for moral and intellectual synthesis, but the task has to be undertaken if socialism has to recapture its pristine inspiration and idealism. Marx, as Lenin pointed out, had synthesised German philosophy, French socialism and British classical economics to create his grand and noble structure of thought. Another moral and intellectual genius must arise to perform anew a similar creative act of synthesis so that socialism might become a faith for the future rather than one of the “wasms” of the past.

(b) The concept of community is not clearly worked out. To the extent it is, it remains on paper: mainly for the reason that the task of “development” of the community is given to paid “servants” of the State who have generally no faith in, or understanding of community; and who themselves do not belong to any community. In the communitarian form of society the concept of belonging to a community is very

important. In Switzerland, for instance, where the community still exists, every Swiss belongs to his home commune.

The official 'developers' of community have not such concept of belonging, and that is one reason why their efforts do not go very far. It might be added here that though the Indian village is far from being a community, its inhabitants do have a sense of belonging to their village and to one another. The sense is weak in all conscience, but it is there. The programmes of community development and the officers in charge of it do little in practice to strengthen this sense. The programme has been laying more emphasis on developing agriculture and industry and building schools, hospitals, community centres, approach roads, etc. than on developing the spirit of community. The latter is a more difficult task, but it has to be tackled to make community development meaningful. For this a clearer picture of community has to be prepared and popularised—not because the official circular from above requires it, but because of inner conviction.

The local community should be so developed that it becomes a miniature welfare State. Being the primary community it must take primary responsibility to provide work and shelter for every family; to organise production so as to fulfil the primary needs of food and clothing; to provide for primary education and primary health services. The needy and the indigent should be a first charge on the community, and every earning member of the community, no matter where residing, must contribute his share to the primary social service needs of the community. Every family living in the community, while working for its own welfare, must keep the welfare of every other family in view. The economic resources and activities of the village must have the welfare of the community as their first charge. It is these things that should signify community development above all else.

(c) The Community Development and other rural development programmes have no conception of balanced agro-industrial communities. There is no doubt that village industries are being developed, but that is only from the point of view of tackling the unemployment problem and raising the living standards of the villagers. There is no idea behind the village industries programme of a new type of socio-economic organization; or, perhaps it would be more correct to say that the idea behind it is that of

an atomised society sharply divided between urban and rural sectors with the first dominating the second. Apart from all philosophical considerations of social reconstruction, it should be emphatically pointed out that if the latter concept of society persists, the villages of India are sure to be perpetuated as permanently depressed areas.

(d) This defect has already been partly considered in (a) above. It was shown there that if the superstructure was to be individualistic, there was no meaning in trying to establish community at the base. In such a society the atmosphere of community will be lacking, without which it will be impossible to sustain the basic communities.

Let me elucidate this by taking an example. Let us take the political institutions. It is a common observation that village *panchayats* do not function as they were intended to. There may be several reasons for this. But I am sure that one of the most important reasons is the divisive influence of the existing atomistic polity. An attempt is being rightly made to see that *panchayat* elections are as nearly unanimous as possible and that parties do not project themselves into them and the villages function as communities. At the same time, at elections to higher bodies the same village communities are split again into individuals who have to line up behind conflicting parties. The result is that the community is disrupted and the *panchayat* is unable to function in the wholesome manner that every one desires.

It is the same with the economic and other institutions and activities. Our planning, for instance, does not begin with the village and the region and go upwards, but from the centre, going downwards. This does not help to develop the communities because they are not given an opportunity to plan for themselves as communities and then to coordinate their plans from level to level. The economic institutions State or private, are also top organisations whose activities are in the nature of economic 'invasions' from outside the community, tending to dislocate and disintegrate the communal life. So on and on.

So much about the defects of present programmes of community development. Let me return now to the foundation of our polity. The foundation, as stated already, must be self-governing, self-sufficient, agro-industrial, urbo-rural, local communities. The highest political institution of the local community

should be the General Assembly—the *Gram Sabha*—of which all the adults should be considered members. The selection of the Executive—the *Panchayat*—should be by general consensus of opinion in the Sabha. There should be no 'candidates', i.e., no one should 'stand' for any post. There should be clear-cut qualifications, as in ancient times, laid down for all selective posts. No individual should hold the same post for more than a defined period of time. The panchayat should function through sub-committees, charged with different responsibilities. There should be no official or member appointed or nominated by the State government in the panchayat or its sub-committees.

It may be questioned if there can ever be a general consensus of opinion amongst villagers who are divided into castes and factions and have conflicting interests. It is well known that for thousands of years the villages of India elected their executive councils by general agreement. Those villages were by no means homogeneous and ideal communities. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that the experience of centuries cannot be repeated again. The only alternative method of election of village councils or panchayats was that of drawing lots. There is nothing undemocratic in selection by lots. Therefore, I am emphatically of the view that the villages should be given an option to choose between the methods of selection by general agreement or by drawing lots or, alternatively, it might be provided that the villages first try the former method, and failing therein take recourse to the latter. Something similar happens in the Bhoodan movement. When the landless families are unable to agree amongst themselves about the distribution of Bhoodan lands between themselves, the issue is decided by drawing lots. It is not our experience that there has been in any case dissatisfaction with decisions reached in this manner.

The question may also be asked if the village panchayats, as they are today, would be able to function in the manner visualised above. There is no better way to teach the young except by giving them responsibility. In the same manner the only way to make the villages self-governing, self-reliant and self-sufficient is to throw upon them real responsibilities. There was a time when the Indian village republics were self-created, like the Swiss communes, and their powers and functions were not given to them from above. But in the present conditions they have to be

recreated by a deliberate and bold process of devolution and decentralization, if Indian democracy has to have a firm base and become a living reality. I believe that the responsibility given to the gram sabha and the panchayat should be in things that really do matter. For instance, it should be the responsibility of the gram sabha and its panchayat to ensure that no one in the village went without food, clothing and shelter; no child went without primary education; every one received primary medical care. The sabha and panchayat should see that the village became self-sufficient in the matter of food and clothing as soon as possible. Further, they should so plan that within five years, let us say, there was no unemployment in the village and every family reached a minimum standard of living. Self-government, to be real, should be about essential problems of life.

It would be necessary for some time to help the village from above, but the responsibility must be clearly defined and the demand for help must come from the village in specific terms, meant to supplement what has been or is proposed to be done by the collective effort of the village. No help should be given until the village has proved that it has done and is prepared to do its best to help itself. Eventually such help will have to come from the next larger communal organization, the regional community, but at the beginning it will have to come from the State government. Social and political workers must go in large numbers to the villages, not to make promises but to preach self-reliance and to help them to practise it.

The development of the rest of the polity need not wait till the villages and townships become real communities as visualised here. Our work must begin at all levels simultaneously, otherwise it will not succeed at any level.

The next level of the political structure would obviously be that of the regional community. Here, as already indicated, the gram panchayats will have to be integrated into the *Panchayat Samiti*, as recommended by the Balvantray Mehta team, with this difference that the nature and functions of the *Samiti* should be those of an autonomous self-governing community as discussed in the previous chapter: the *Samiti* should have powers and obligations to do all that may be within its competence. As suggested already, the *panchayat samiti*, comprising the optimum community as defined above, would play a key role in the

political and economic life of the country, particularly in the processes of planning and development.

There is one important point which I wish to emphasise in connection with the formation of the *panchayat samiti*. The *samiti* should be elected by the *gram panchayats* and not by their members. This at first might appear to be a distinction between six and half-a-dozen. But that is not so. We have here a major principle of communal life involved. It is the *gram panchayat* as a body that represents the village community and not its members. The *panchayat samiti*, in its turn, is a representative of the *gram panchayats*, and it is the latter that should be represented as such and not their members.

Following the pattern of social organization described in the previous section, the political structure would rise storey by storey from the foundation. The next storey above the *panchayat samiti* would be that of the District Council (or whatever name be given to it), which will be formed by the integration of the *panchayat samitis* of the district—again the *samitis*, as such electing their representatives and not their members. The district councils, in their turn, should have all the powers and obligations necessary to do everything that may be within their competence.

In a similar manner all the district councils of a State would come together to create the State Assembly. The State Assemblies, in like manner, would bring into being the *Lok Sabha*. Thus the political institution at each level is an integration of all the institutions at the lower level.

Before proceeding further I should like to point out that the foregoing discussion should show that the issue is not merely one of 'local' self-government, nor of direct or indirect elections. It would be wrong to suppose that if 'local bodies' were given more powers and the direct system of election were replaced with an indirect one, and the rest of the social organization were left as it is, the resultant would be the kind of polity that is being advocated here. The polity herein suggested is not a graft on the existing body of society, but an organic part of a radically transformed social order.

My aim here is not to write a new Constitution for India. I have tried merely to discuss some underlying principles and to indicate the general pattern of the social and political

organization. However, it may be useful to deal with a few points of detail by way of further clarification.

First, let me take the question of the Executive at the different levels. At the Primary Community level the *Panchayat* is the executive; it might allot different executive functions to its individual members or to small committees. At the Regional Community level, the *Panchayat Samiti* is the executive body and it would function through committees. At the level of the District Community, the District Council would be the executive body, and it would also function through committees. At the level of the Provincial Community, the *Pranta Sabha* would appoint committees which would be the executive bodies, responsible to the Sabha. Likewise, at the level of the National Community, the *Rashtra Sabha* would appoint committees which would be the executive bodies, responsible to the Sabha.

Who would exercise the legislative powers, it may be asked. According to my conception, each community has powers to make rules and laws in order to manage its internal affairs, provided they do not conflict with the interests of other communities at the same level and with the rules and laws laid down by the communities at higher levels. The higher communal bodies will legislate in their allotted spheres. Rules and laws may be passed by other communal bodies too, such as educational and economic associations.

The committees should be small, workable bodies with powers to co-opt experts who would participate fully but without the right of vote. Each committee would have a chairman and a secretary, but, apart from performing the functions of their office, they would enjoy no special powers or privileges. Each committee would be directly responsible to the general body which would appoint it.

In order to coordinate the work of the different committees, there would be a Coordinating Committee, consisting of one representative from each committee; the representative may be the chairman, secretary or any member of the committee as decided upon from time to time by the committee concerned. The decisions of the Coordinating Committee would be binding on every other committee. Upto the district level, the coordinating committee would be the *panchayat*, the *panchayat samiti* and the district council, which would meet at fixed times.

Every committee would have collective responsibility. The representative communal bodies would meet periodically, but the committees would be in perpetual session. Matters of policy would be decided upon, on the motion of a committee or an individual member, by the representative bodies concerned. The committees would execute the policies.

It should be clear from this that at the Provincial and National levels there would be no Ministers, Chief Ministers or Prime Minister as at present. As stated above, government would be conducted by committees of the representative bodies. The institution of Prime Minister and Chief Minister, which concentrates too much power into the hands of single individuals, is undemocratic and smacks of the gun-powder of totalitarianism. It further leads to such dangerous psychological developments as the 'hero-cult' or the 'cult of the individual'.

The President of the different representative communal bodies will have no administrative functions. But it would be his responsibility to see that the representative body of which he is president functions properly and according to the rules laid down. He would also have extraordinary emergency powers in case of the breakdown of the democratic apparatus of the community concerned.

The President of the Rashtra Sabha, in addition to the powers mentioned in the last para, would also be the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces and responsible to the Sabha for the defence of the nation. He would be assisted by a committee for defence, of which he would be the chairman.

In their task of administration the committees would be assisted by paid civil servants. At each level the civil servants would be appointed by the corresponding authority created for that purpose by the representative body concerned and on terms laid down by the latter. This will be a sovereign right of the communities : to appoint and dismiss their servants. At the level of the primary community the civil servant might be an honorary, part-time or full-time volunteer. Even at higher levels there might be honorary civil servants.

It should be pointed out here that because of the decentralised pattern of the social, political and economic organization, the administration would not be top-heavy and far-removed from the people as at present.

In the light of the above, it might be useful to turn for a moment to what is perhaps one of the most serious problems of the present day: the problem of bureaucracy and corruption. Some think that one solution of corruption is dictatorship. But even dictatorship is no solution of bureaucracy. To the contrary, we know that dictatorship breeds bureaucracy faster than other systems of government, and, in the bargain, makes it all-powerful.

Even as regards corruption, it is not generally realised that there is corruption on a gigantic scale in the dictatorships—only its form is changed. Instead of corruption in the sense of bribery and the like, there is grosser corruption in the form of lying, deceit, intrigue, terror, enslavement of the human mind, crucifixion of the dignity of man. All this corrupts human life far more than bribery and similar other things.

The only true solution of the problem both of bureaucracy and corruption is direct self-government of the people and direct and immediate supervision and control over the civil servants by the people and their elected organs. In the primary communities, as I have said above, there need be no paid civil servants. In the larger communities the civil servants would be directly under the control and supervision of the communal body concerned. Further, it would obviously be in the interest of the communities to keep the cost of the administration as low as possible. So there will be a natural check on proliferation of the bureaucracy. Thus as self-government develops, the civil servant becomes either unnecessary or subject to the immediate elected authority.

There may, however, be one danger in all this. If the communal representative bodies and their members themselves become corrupt, there would be little check on corruption in this scheme of things. I admit that it is quite likely that in the beginning it might well be so, but I refuse to believe that such a situation could last long. If the responsibility were really thrown upon the people so that they could see clearly that their suffering was due to the fact that they had chosen the wrong type of people to manage their affairs, the relationship between the people, their representatives and civil servants would be so intimate and direct that it should not take long for the people to remedy the situation.

In this connection it might be observed that it would be worth while to give serious thought to the qualifications of representatives and civil servants. Dr. Bhagwan Das in his *Notes on the*

Outline Scheme of Swaraj has devoted a whole section to the question of qualifications for legislators. I think his views deserve serious consideration. Nevertheless, it is necessary to remember that ultimately it is the good sense of the people themselves that can guarantee that their representatives and servants would be of the right sort.

It is not possible in this paper to consider what departments of administration are to be entrusted to which community. I have emphasised the general principle that every community would have powers to do all that may be within its natural competence. Since there is general inertia among the people at present, this may not be much. Powers would have to be 'given' from above. I should, therefore, say that I would take courage in both hands and give to the communities the utmost powers possible. Some of the powers might not be used, some might be abused. But the people would learn, and it would be the job of the voluntary social workers to help them learn.

I should, therefore, say that police, justice, taxation, collection, social services, planning, should all be decentralised to the maximum possible extent. As the people learn and acquire self-confidence, the process of decentralisation, instead of starting from above, would be normalised and begin to operate from below.

A new political structure like the one envisaged here will not be built in a day, if for nothing else, for the reason that the foundation will have to be laid first and the structure built from below, storey by storey. The economic structure too would have to be built along with it. All this would take time; so there will have to be a period of transition.

Village *panchayats* have been established in the greater part of the country. These have to be remodelled according to the principles put forward in this paper. The next stage would be the establishment of *panchayat samitis*. This has also been started already, such as in Rajasthan. But again the conception behind it has to be radically changed. When *panchayat samitis* are established, the District Councils would have to be constituted. The economic institutions would also have to be organised side by side. Planning and the whole system of education would have to be re-oriented.

I have advocated the election of village *panchayats* by common agreement or drawing of lots. Naturally, there is no scope for political parties to play any role in this process. As a matter of fact, even under the present system of election two major parties of the country¹ have already agreed not to set up party candidates for village *panchayat* elections. I propose that the principle be extended by law to the higher bodies too—up to the District Councils in the first instance. Under an indirect system of election, when the primary electoral units—the village *panchayats*—have a non-partisan character, there would be no sense in introducing parties into elections to the *panchayat samitis* and district councils. Besides, partisanship militates against the spirit of community that we wish to create and the process of harmonisation that we wish to introduce into the life of society.

It is possible that before we reach the district level throughout the country, the general election of 1962 would intervene. If communitarian polity is accepted as our goal, it would be necessary to take steps so that the general election does not thwart, distort or make difficult the progress to that goal. Now, there is no doubt that if the parties 'fight' the elections in the usual manner, every village would again be politically disrupted and disunited, doing incalculable harm to the development of the community. The *panchayat samitis* and district councils, elected on a non-party basis, would also be divided into partisan factions, again doing irreparable harm to their work as harmonious communal bodies, endeavouring to serve the community impartially.

At the same time the party system exists and there are parties whose main function is to fight elections. Obviously, therefore, a compromise will have to be made.

The first step should be for the parties to reach an agreement that the village *panchayats*, the *panchayat samitis* and the district councils, wherever they are constituted, would be scrupulously kept out of the election.

The appropriate electoral colleges not being in existence, it would have to be the individual voters who would participate in the election. But, as a compromise, I propose that instead of parties setting up candidates, the voters themselves should be enabled to do it. A year ago I had made a similar proposal in a

¹ The Congress and the Praja Socialist Party.

speech to Members of Parliament on September 23, 1958. This is what I had said :

Suppose in a constituency, let us say there are 300 booths. For each booth, let us say, there are 2,000 voters. Before the elections, for the purpose of setting up of candidates, let meetings of the voters be held in each booth area, not necessarily at the station where the booth is going to be established, but at any convenient place in the booth area. Let the voters meet and let them elect two delegates as they do in Yugoslavia. There is nothing sacred about the number. I am making a suggestion. Let them elect two delegates by normal democratic procedure and majority votes. Then, afterwards, let all these delegates, may be 600 of them, hold a conference and let the nomination of the candidates be made at this conference. Let there be a law regulating that anyone can propose a name and second the name. The law may lay down that anyone whose name has been proposed and seconded, if he receives a certain percentage of the votes—25 percent, 30 percent or more, whatever be the number—is nominated as candidate by the delegates of the voters. Then those delegates do their campaigning. Before the selection of those delegates let no party go into the field and say, " So and so must be nominated ". No names should be mentioned. Let all the parties go to educate the public as to what sort of people should be nominated, what kind of policies, programme—agrarian, industrial, foreign or whatever it is—should be followed. Let every party go and try to educate the public. If the parties perform merely the educative functions, they have a very wide function to perform in society. Let them do that in the pre-nomination period. After the nomination, because we have the party system, let us make a compromise . . . Suppose the delegates' conference has nominated three candidates or four candidates, let the parties choose out of those candidates and decide to give their support to one or the other just as parties decide about individuals. These are candidates of the people. They have been put up by the people of the constituency, not by any party caucus, whether it is local caucus or a State caucus or the All-India caucus. They are the nominees of the people. Then their names again go to the people for their votes. I think that if this practice were

followed much of the evils of the party system would be remedied. May be a new avenue would be open to us to experience new forms of democracy.

After the election, the members of the Legislature concerned would elect by majority vote a leader, who would be Prime Minister or Chief Minister. He would then form his cabinet.

This is merely a proposal for the transition. Any other method might be followed keeping in view the picture of the new polity.

The picture drawn here of the polity for India, and of social organisation in general, might perhaps appear to be idealistic. If so, I would not consider that to be a disqualification. An ideal cannot but be idealistic. The question is if the ideal is impractical, unscientific or otherwise ill-conceived. I have tried in the preceding pages to show that all relevant considerations lead irresistibly towards it.

The achievement of this ideal would, however, be a colossal task. Thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of voluntary workers would be needed over a number of years to accomplish it.

The Government should lend its full support; but it is necessary to remember that the main burden of the task would have to be borne by voluntary political and social workers and institutions. The heart of the problem is to create the 'spirit of community', without which the whole body politic would be without life and soul. This is a task of moral regeneration to be brought about by example, service, sacrifice and love. Those who occupy high places in society—in politics, business, the professions—bear the heavy responsibility of leading the people by personal example.

The task also is one of social engineering, needing the help of the State; of scientists, experts, educationists, businessmen, experimenters; of men and women; of young and old.

It is a task of dedication; of creation; of self-discovery.

It is a task that defines India's destiny. It spells a challenge to India's sons and daughters. Will they accept the challenge?

1961

20. Swaraj for the People*

SOME time ago I had circulated privately a paper on what I had termed 'Reconstruction of Indian Polity'. A number of seminars and group discussions have been held since, in this country and abroad, and many kind friends, Indian and foreign, have sent me their suggestions and criticisms. Some of these have appeared in the *Bhoodan Weekly*.

Even though the paper had not been made public, fragmentary reports have appeared in the press along with comments.

The seminars and private criticisms have been of the greatest value to me and a sizeable volume of material has accumulated that will take time to digest properly.

I might say that while I have not yet found any reason to change the essential points of my thesis, my ideas have changed on several other matters and I have come to realise that the manner of presentation must also be radically altered. It has also been made clear to me that I had tried, rather unwisely, to cover within a very short space too wide a ground which has naturally led to unnecessary misunderstanding.

In view of the pressing and large demands upon my time on account of active involvement in a mass movement to which I cannot but give first priority, it is difficult to say when it would be possible to re-write and publish my paper. But as my interest in the question was never academic or scholastic, and also because I consider it to be a matter that should receive urgent public attention, I am venturing to set forth below my arguments and proposals regarding the central question raised in the original paper, namely that of reform and reconstruction of the political

* Pamphlet published by the Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh (Varanasi).

institutions and processes of this country so as to make them more democratic, efficient, enduring and meaningful.

The philosophical, sociological and economic aspects of the question I shall leave aside for the present, referring to those only when unavoidable. Let me, however, emphasize that the political structure of the country must of necessity be linked intimately with the whole structure of society and the mode of life and thought of its people.

Before I turn to the subject I should like to make two brief statements. The first of these is in regard to one class of my critics. The central point of this kind of criticism is that I am an enemy of democracy and my real aim is to undermine Indian democracy while pretending to be anxious to broaden and deepen it. I really do not know how to deal with criticism that starts with questioning motives and imputing dishonesty. Nevertheless, I should like to take this opportunity—lest there should be any misunderstanding on that score—to affirm my undying and unchanging faith in human freedom and the democratic way of life. I hold as fast even now to the following words—and shall always hold fast to them—as when I uttered them a few years ago :

Freedom has become a passion of life and I shall not see it compromised for bread, for power, for security, for prosperity, for the glory of the State or for anything else. (*From Socialism to Sarvodaya*).

The other statement is in regard to my omission to mention in my paper the significant and seminal contribution of the late Mr. M. N. Roy to the body of thought with which I am dealing. This has been seriously misunderstood in circles from which I had every right to expect substantial support. Those among them who are acquainted with me—and I do count several friends in those circles—know well the influence of Roy on the evolution of my thought and the high regard in which I have always held him even when I have found it difficult sometimes to agree with him. I believe there is no need for me to add that at no time have I claimed to have made an original contribution to political thought. I am indebted not only to Roy, but to many others—most of all to Gandhiji. At the same time I must also

make it clear that no one else but myself should be held responsible for the ideas I had expressed in my original paper or am about to do now.

The Inverted Pyramid or Swaraj from Above

The Constituent Assembly of India, in the name of the people, resolved :

- (a) to constitute India into a Sovereign Democratic Republic ;
- (b) to secure to all its citizens Justice, social, economic, and political ; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship ; Equality of status and of opportunity ; and
- (c) to promote among them all Fraternity, assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the nation.

These aims and purposes together do make up an inspiring and challenging image of democracy. In order to help render that image into a concrete reality, the Assembly adopted and enacted the present Constitution of India, which, as amended from time to time, stands as a bulwark of freedom and democracy.

The people of this country may justly be proud of the fact that they have deliberately chosen the democratic way of life, despite the example of many neighbouring countries having embraced dictatorship of one kind or another. It is evidence of the people's cultural and spiritual maturity that they have done so.

While affirming all this, it is desirable to take stock of our decade of democratic experience. This should be done in the light of the experience of other countries of Asia and Africa as well as of the mature Western democracies.

The most striking fact that has emerged from the working of ten years of our Constitution is that the people of the country, that is to say, the twenty crores of voters, have felt rather *left out of it all*. They have no doubt had the opportunity of participating in two General Elections, but beyond that transient contact with the workings of democracy, they have had nothing further to do with it. It is very common to hear the remark made by common people even in the countryside that though *Swaraj* came, it had not come to them. They complain that they are ruled much in the same manner and by the same kind of people

as during British rule. They find that not even in local affairs have they a hand and that not even the humblest civil servant is in any manner accountable to them ; on the contrary, they find that he lords it over them and even exacts illegal gratification much as in the old days. The truth must be faced that the people have not been able to experience the sensation of *Swaraj*. It is only the very thin layer of the educated middle class, and even of them only those directly engaged in political activity, who are involved in the working of our democracy.

The result of this state of affairs is that our democracy is found to be resting on a very narrow base. It is like an inverted pyramid that stands on its head. Our obvious task is to set this picture right and stand the pyramid on its base. The mere fact that every adult Indian has the right to vote does not make the pyramid broad-based. The crores of individual and disparate voters are like a heap of particles of sand that can never be a foundation for any structure. The particles must be united to form bricks or encased within concrete moulds to be able to act as foundation stones. It is, therefore, obvious that if stability has to be imparted to our democracy, the base must be broadened and the top layers suitably architected into the basic structure. If the base were strong, there would be little danger of the whole edifice of democracy toppling down at the adventurer's touch. Ours is a country of historic ruins. One has only to visit any of the ruins to see what happens when an edifice falls to the ground. It is always the roofing that comes down first, then the walls ; the upper storeys first, then the lower ; and the foundation stones are found intact even after the passage of thousands of years. The durability of a structure—no matter how ambitious—depends on the strength of the foundation and the lower, supporting structure.

In some countries of Asia and Africa the outward forms of Western democracy had been imported. That is to say, there were, generally speaking, adult franchise, a number of contending parties, an elected parliament and a government responsible to it. That meant, as in India, that there was a mass of disparate individual voters at the bottom—the sand heap—and on that foundation of sand was raised the topmost storey of government. In such a state of affairs, it was only natural that people should feel that they had no stake in that kind of democracy even though

they had the votes and that at the slightest push the pyramid of democracy standing on its head would topple down and the millions of particles of sand, viz., the disorganized voters, would look on as helpless spectators. It is conceivable that if the democracy that had been knocked down was corrupt and inefficient and had failed to tackle such vital problems as those of food and unemployment, the voters might even welcome the event. It is not the abstract virtues of democracy that so excite us, the democratic intelligentsia, but the concrete fruits of democracy in terms of welfare and the palpable stake they have or part they play in working it that determine the attitude of the mass of the people anywhere to the institutions and processes of democracy.

It would be foolish not to profit from the experience of so many countries of the world, that are by no means confined to the continents of Asia and Africa. It is true that there is no imminent danger of subversion of our democracy, but we should never forget that it also suffers from the very same defects that have sent democracy to its doom elsewhere. The danger quite conceivably might become imminent once the few national leaders of today disappear from the political scene.

There is no doubt that the developed and mature democracies of the West are not so top-heavy and devoid of the support of broad-based infra-structures of various kinds. Nevertheless, even there government and decision-making do remain the privilege of the few. Except in Switzerland and perhaps the Scandinavian countries, Western democracy is little more than government by consent. With the growth of science and technology and a complex economic system, government is becoming more and more the business of smaller and smaller numbers of people. With the consequent growing concentration of economic and political power in the hands of fewer people—whether they are private citizens or officers of the State—democracy would soon be just a matter of form rather than of substance.

Western democracy will perhaps solve its own internal problems, but it must be emphasized that the Western concept of democracy as government by consent, or, in other words, as a political system that offers an opportunity to the people to change their government peacefully, is not an adequate enough concept, and that we should profit from the experience of the West and try to move forward towards a more adequate democracy. The

next step beyond government by consent is people's participation in government, or a participating democracy.

Now, it is obvious that it would be impossible for the millions of Indian voters to participate in government if that were to be run only from Delhi or the few capitals of the States. In order that the people might participate in government, government must be brought as near to the people as possible. This would require a thorough-going system of political as well as economic decentralization.

There is in the West a very healthy and vigorous system of local self-government. While this is to be welcomed, local self-government by itself cannot satisfy the needs of participating democracy as I visualise it. In the West, while there is a substantial measure of local self-government, the central government is all powerful; that is to say, all the major and vital decisions are taken at the centre. This is far from my concept of participating democracy. What I have in mind is what Gandhiji often used to emphasize, namely, that as you proceed from the bottom level of government to the top, each higher level should have less and less functions and powers. To go back to the image of the inverted pyramid, the broad upper levels of present-day democracy must be drastically sawed off and large portions of the vast upper floors brought down to earth, so that the pyramid of democracy could become a real pyramid—narrow at the top and broad at the bottom. In such a system the people at each level would have the fullest opportunity to manage all those affairs that might pertain to that level. Such a system of democracy could give the people a stake in democracy as well as the sensation of *Swaraj*.

It is a remarkable phenomenon that when a dictator knocks down a democratic set-up of the Western type, he at the same time protests his faith in a 'true democracy of the people' that would arise tier by tier from the village upward. The latest instance of this is King Mahendra of Nepal. Sometimes the protestation is sincere, sometimes it is only a ruse to fool the people. Be that as it may, the question is, why is such a protestation voiced at all? The reason is obvious. It is not that such a people's democracy is a hoax, and therefore a convenient tool in the hands of a dictator. Democracy, when standing on its head, as formal democracy of the Western type does, at least where it

lacks the infra-structures, is easily toppled over. The reason the dictators always speak of some kind of basic democracies is that they are shrewd enough to realise that that kind of democracy would be more readily understood by the people as a system in which they would come into their own, rather than be made a plaything by the politicians as in the Western system; and that consequently, the people would rally to the support of the dictators. It is reasonable to expect that those dictators who are sincere in their professions of democracy would make a serious effort to build the new democracy of which they speak. It remains to be seen if the dictators, from the U.A.R. to Nepal, would translate their promise into action and eventually hand over all power to the people and their democratic institutions. The setting up of the National Union in the U.A.R. and Basic Democracies in Pakistan is some little advance in the promised direction, but these countries are still far from being a democracy of any kind whatever. But this unique phenomenon in which two cries go up simultaneously, 'democracy is dead' and 'long live democracy', merits attention.

Political and economic decentralization and strengthening of the lower organs of government might make it appear as if that process would weaken the fabric of the nation and impair the strength and unity of the Centre. The fact that fissiparous tendencies do exist in the country and there are local and linguistic patriotisms and tensions lends force to this view. But a closer examination of the matter would show that we would be far more cohesive and strong as a nation, and the diverse groups making up India would live together far more happily if they had as much freedom and opportunity as possible to manage their affairs and preserve and develop their uniqueness. An all-powerful Centre concentrating too many functions in its hands would only be outwardly strong. Inwardly, it would be under severe stresses and strains, and the danger of its falling apart would be ever present. It should also be evident that such a 'strong' Centre would have gradually to move away from democracy and become more and more totalitarian. It is not without reason that those in India who advocate an unitary form of government have marked fascistic tendencies.

Devolution of power, so that the Centre has only as much of it as required to discharge its *central* functions and all the rest is

exercised by the lower organs, need not necessarily imply a weak Centre. It is all a matter of competence : at each level the elected authority does *all* that it is competent to do. And because at each level the authority concerned finds that there are tasks that lie beyond its competence, it has to federate with other authorities at the same level so as to create a higher level of authority. It may be parenthetically observed that even nation States find in the present age that there are tasks that the strongest among them cannot face ; and so opinion is growing in favour of a world union of peoples. It is this factor of competence that is a guarantee of the strength of the Centre in this system, because it is in the interest of the lower authorities to give all power and opportunity to the Centre to do efficiently and expeditiously all that they themselves cannot do. Defence, foreign affairs, inter-State relations, currency, regulation of imports and exports, preservation of national unity are, for instance, tasks that fall within the competence *only* of the Centre. A central government that is armed with these powers cannot by any stretch of imagination be described as weak, just because the range of subjects in its charge is not so wide. Indeed, such a government would be bound to be strong, powerful, stream-lined and effective. On the other hand, a top-heavy sprawling Centre, poking its finger into every pie, might have the appearance of strength and power, but in actual fact it would be weak, flabby, slow-moving and ineffective.

National unity or strength does not depend upon the list of subjects that a central government deals with, but on such intangible factors as emotional integration, common experiences and aspirations, national ethos, mutual goodwill and the spirit of accommodation, and, above all, upon large-hearted wisdom on the part of national leaders.

II

Panchayati Raj or Swaraj from Below

It may be doubted if the plant of democracy, no matter of what variety, can grow and thrive in a climate of dictatorship. But luckily for us in this country we have the opportunity to re-fashion, broaden and deepen our democracy under ample, if not full, democratic conditions. My plea is that we take advantage of these conditions and get on with the job, so that while there

is still time, we might make our democracy invulnerable and satisfying.

It is a matter of great satisfaction that in our country a beginning has already been made in laying the foundations of participating democracy in the shape of Panchayati Raj, or what was called at first 'democratic decentralization'. The initiative for this experiment came originally from Shri Balwantray Mehta and it has made headway in the face of over-powering odds only because of the drive and vision of Shri S. K. Dey, the Union Minister of Community Development, and the powerful support of the Prime Minister. The Congress Party has accepted the ideal of Panchayati Raj; it has already been introduced into several States; and it is expected that in a few years it will be extended to all the remaining ones.

In the past few months much has been written about Panchayati Raj; so there is no need to describe it in any detail. A few observations, however, are called for. First, it should be noted that the initiative for Panchayati Raj originally came not from the political motive of broadening the base of our democracy or laying the foundations of what I have called 'participating democracy', but from the anxiety to obtain full public co-operation in the execution of development programmes. On account of this restricted aim with which the experiment was started, its significance has not been grasped so well even by the conscious political elements in the country, much less by the people at large. It is clear, however, that the logic of the movement is driving it forward and constantly enlarging and deepening its implications. But there is still need of arousing popular enthusiasm about this measure, and of making the people realize that what was intended was not a procedural reform of the administration at the lower levels, but a political revolution of the greatest significance for the people; that, in effect, the intention and the attempt were to bring *swaraj* to the people. This understanding and enthusiasm cannot be brought about by Development Officers but by the democratic and popular leaders of the country—irrespective of party and ideology—and by social workers and intellectual and moral leaders generally.

In order that Panchayati Raj might become the base of a true participating democracy, certain conditions must be fulfilled.

First, education of the people, understood in the widest sense of the term, is an essential condition for the success of the experiment. This education can best be imparted by disinterested, non-partisan agencies, engaged in social service or tasks of rural development. Political parties might also make a great contribution in this respect, provided they addressed themselves to the task in a non-partisan spirit. Perhaps the best way for them would be to create a common agency through which to carry on this work. Government officers and agencies might also do useful work in this sphere. Schools, libraries, co-operative societies have an important role to play here. It should also be considered whether a non-party and purely educative body of voters which might be called the "All-India Voters' Association" should not be formed in order to render educative service to the voters. There might also be a centre jointly set up and conducted by the Union Ministry of Community Development, the All-India Panchayat Parishad, other all-India local self-government organizations, the Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh, and other all-India rural service agencies. Such a centre could help by way of producing literature, conducting surveys, studying problems, etc.

Second, it is well worth emphasising that the success of Panchayati Raj would depend upon the extent to which organised political parties refrained from interfering with it and trying to convert it into their hand-maiden, and using it as a jumping ground to climb to power. There is no doubt that as consciousness grows among the people at the ground level, they would be less and less liable to be moved about as pawns by political parties and ambitious politicians. But in the initial stages it is necessary for political parties, in the interests of the people whom they claim to be anxious to serve, to place themselves under a self-denying ordinance and refrain from either setting up party candidates or putting pressure on the elected representatives to become party members, so as to be able to control the basic institutions of democracy. For the sake of the health and vitality of these institutions and intelligent participation of the people in the working of democracy, it would be best to leave these institutions in the direct control of the people, without party interference. The parties might, however, carry on educative work among the people, even if that involved putting forward divergent ideas and policies. If the leaders of all the political parties came to an

honest agreement amongst themselves, it should not be difficult to achieve this aim.

Third, there should be a real devolution of power and not a make-belief. It is possible to construct the outward structure of Panchayati Raj and to give it no substance. That would be like a body without a soul, dead from the start, a still-born child. There is need here for sincerity, imagination and courage. The people must be trusted. There is a tendency among those of us who have received some education to distrust the ability and intelligence of the common people, and it is possible to talk of devolution of power without in reality surrendering any power. No one can learn to discharge responsibility unless responsibility is really given to one. Withholding of responsibility, either on account of lack of confidence in the people or of reluctance to surrender power, would lead naturally, as it has already done to a considerable extent, to an attitude of irresponsibility in the people who will for ever be on the look-out for heroes and miracle-makers to solve their problems. It is out of such a psychological situation that dictators are born. For democracy to be a success, it is necessary that the people are prepared and given full opportunity to shoulder responsibility.

There are in the Panchayati Raj three tiers of authority and administration: the Village Panchayat, the Block Panchayat Samiti and the Zila Parishad. At each of these tiers the people must be given the opportunity to do for themselves all that might be within their competence. In the British administrative system the District Magistrate and Collector was the key-stone: his position still remains the same. But if the devolution of power in Panchayati Raj is real, then eventually the District Magistrate should disappear or remain only as a representative in the district of the State Government just as the Governor is now only a representative in the State of the Central Government. Panchayati Raj even in Rajasthan, where it began, is yet a far cry from this consummation. True, such a process will take time, but it is not clear that there is agreement about the ultimate goal.

Fourth, it is imperative that at each level the local authority should be given its own minimum resources. If control of resources remains in the hands of the State Government, the devolution is bound to be rather nominal. 'He who pays the piper calls the tune' would be as true here as anywhere. I am

afraid in this sphere progress has been even less marked than in the case of devolution of authority and functions. In this connection, I suggest that land revenue, even though it does not amount to very much, should be the first resource to be placed totally at the disposal of the Village Panchayat and the Panchayat Samiti. It should no longer be the prerogative of the State Government to allocate sums out of land revenue to these bodies. Subject to an equalization fund for the purpose of aiding the poorer villages and blocks, the entire land revenue should be left in the hands of the Panchayats and the Samitis. Other possible sources of revenue must also be found and placed at the disposal of the Panchayati Raj in order that it might function with dignity and enjoy its autonomy. This does not mean that for development programmes Panchayati Raj should not receive allocations of funds from the State or the Centre.

Fifth, Panchayati Raj should be able as soon as possible to exercise real authority over the civil servants under its charge, who should be held fully accountable to it. Even in the matter of recruitment, it should be advisable to associate the local authorities or their nominees. At the same time provision should be made to assure to the civil servants justice and security of service and freedom to discharge their duties without improper interference.

Sixth, of the three-tier structure of Panchayati Raj, the bottom tier, the *gram panchayat*, is obviously the foundation. The strength and vitality of the whole structure—and its democratic nature—would depend upon the strength and vitality and democratic nature of the *gram panchayat*. I have been emphasising here the element of people's *participation* as a true measure of democracy. Now, if there is any level of self-government at which the *fullest* participation of the people is practicable, it is at the village level. It is only there that direct democracy can adequately function.

But if at the village level the only recognised and statutory body were to be the *panchayat*, and the people were to have no other part in the management of village affairs than to cast their votes at *panchayat* elections, even village democracy would fail to be satisfying, adequate and sound. And that would render unsound the whole structure of Panchayati Raj. The effectiveness of the village *panchayat*, its strength and vitality, would depend

upon the sustained, intelligent and enthusiastic interest and cooperation of the village community in its affairs and activities.

Even before the advent of Panchayati Raj there were village *panchayats*, but they were not agents of village democracy then : they were rather agents of the State governments, or worse, of the local officers. If under Panchayati Raj too the village *panchayats* were not to draw their strength, authority and sustenance consistently from the village community, they would remain, as before, instruments through which the State government and its officers would control and manipulate the village population. Panchayati Raj reared on such a foundation would not be a structure of democracy rising from below but an extension of bureaucratic rule from above.

In order, therefore, to give a true base to our democracy and to involve actively and continuously the whole people in its working, it is necessary to go lower down than the *panchayat*—to the people themselves—and to constitute the entire adult membership of the village community into a statutory collective body, the *gram sabha*. The *panchayat* should function as an executive of the *sabha*, which should have power to set up other committees and teams for specific purposes.

This is being actually attempted now, but there is a peculiar hesitancy noticeable in trusting the good sense and capacity of the people. *Gram sabhas* are being constituted, but they do not function and the *panchayats*, or some times only their presidents, usurp all authority, naturally inducing a sense of indifference among the people. The *gram sabha* should meet as often as possible, say, quarterly, and all important matters, including the budget, must be placed before it not only for discussion and eliciting opinion but for approval and acceptance.

Then would it be that the people would awaken to their responsibilities and opportunities, and the *gram panchayats* cease to be convenient tools in the hands of officers of the State or the vested and selfish interests in the village communities themselves and become fit instruments for execution of the people's will. When this happens, the *gram sabhas*, and not the *gram panchayats*, will become the bottom tier, the ground floor, of the noble edifice of democracy, providing it with the broadest and most stable and solid foundations.

Therefore, all those interested in strengthening Indian democracy and helping the people to govern themselves should join together and endeavour to develop in them the necessary social consciousness, practical ability and moral quality. Here is a truly inspiring challenge for all the democratic parties of this country—that is, if they have time from the scramble for power for themselves. All training and educative programmes, official and non-official, should be aimed at this over-riding objective.

Wherever *panchayat* presidents have been given powers to nominate some members of their executive, the law should be amended so that, even if nomination were to be found necessary and desirable, the powers of nomination are exercised by the groups or interests concerned, or by the *panchayat* as a whole, or by yet another method; but, in no case, should the *panchayat* president be encouraged by law to become a powerful boss with a number of members always in his pocket.

In regard to elections to village *panchayats*, it is my emphatic view that they should be held without contest. This view has been severely criticised in some quarters; in others, opinion seems to have veered round to it. For myself, the more have I thought over this question, the more have I discussed it with others and the more have I learnt of the workings of village *panchayats*, the more convinced have I become that if Panchayati Raj is to succeed, contests at elections to village *panchayats* must be avoided. The village today is a much divided house. There are caste and class differences; there are family and other factions. There is no collective will in the village. On the other hand, the tasks that the villages face can never be tackled unless there is united and collective effort. A community spirit must be created before there could be proper community development. To introduce electoral contests into the village is to throw a monkey-wrench into the works. Let the people understand that the condition of their enjoying self-rule is that they agree to work together for the common good; not because any dictator wishes to impose his will upon them, but because that is the naked, imperative condition on which they can at all rule over themselves and advance both their personal and common interests.

Self-government through faction-fighting will not be self-government, but self-ruination. Let it be remembered that the village is a primary, face-to-face community where the people

are physically thrown together and have to share their joys and sorrows. This village, as I have just said, is a disrupted community. It would be a tragedy and a mockery of democracy if the latter were to be made an instrument of further disruption. The cry has already gone forth from certain parts of the country that the villages had better be left as they were, rather than be made cock-pits in the name of Panchayati Raj. The reason for that is that electoral contests have already produced such tensions that there is a virtual stalemate in the affairs of the *panchayats*. If this state of affairs continues, there is danger that in a few years every one would become so sick of the very words *panchayats* and *Panchayati Raj* that government from above through bureaucratic civil servants would come to be welcomed with open arms and people's democracy would have been declared to be a total failure and a chimera. That would be a terrific blow to the cause of democracy in this country, which in the conditions described in the first chapter, might open the way for dictatorship.

In opposition to this view it is pointed out that as the village community is rent with conflicting interests, it is impractical to talk of uncontested elections to the panchayats. The view presented above stresses that *just* because the village is a disharmonious community at present, contests should be avoided so that the *panchayats* might be able to mobilize the entire community for tasks of reconstruction and development.

However, since this argument is persistently trotted out, let us examine it a little closely. True, there are different, even conflicting interests, in the village. But it is not the *panchayat* that can bring about any radical socio-economic change in the village community: it cannot abolish land-ownership, alter tenancy law, re-distribute land, legislate on interest rates and money-lending, or do anything else of the sort. In the case of elections to the Vidhan Sabha and the Lok Sabha the differences in village society might play an important part, but for purposes of *panchayat* elections they are irrelevant. The real remedy for the economic and social divisions in the village is, (a) to hurry up with the needed economic and social legislation, (b) to enforce strictly the existing law in these regards and, (c) to intensify the vital but neglected work of adult mass education; rather than to encourage the existing regrettable divisions to be used further to accentuate conflict and disharmony.

I should like at this point to digress a little in order to emphasize that in my view the one single economic reform needed most to make the village, as well as its political and economic institutions, effective and harmonious bodies is to vest ownership and management of all village lands in the *gram sabha*, so that each person in the village becomes an equal share-holder in the landed wealth of the village and that wealth is utilized equitably for the benefit of every member of the community, as also of the community as a whole. In the conditions of our country, where the land-man ratio is so low; where the proportion of the population dependent upon land is so overwhelmingly large; where the rural population is likely, in spite of the growing rate of urbanization, to continue to rise; where each new generation implies further fragmentation of the land; and where the evil of sub-feudation has become so chronic and land legislation and administration so complicated, encouraging litigation, perjury and other forms of moral depravity, no lesser measures of land reform are going to make much difference. Fortunately, Vinobaji's Bhoodan-Gramdan movement has gone a long way to prepare the ground for such a radical agrarian legislation.

To return to the main point. Let us ask what the functions of a *panchayat* are. Clearly its most important function is to initiate and, after approval of the *gram sabha*, to execute plans and programmes of development. The vital question is, can the *panchayat* perform this function better when it represents unity and harmony than when it reflects factionalism and discord? Even a slight acquaintance with reality should leave no one in doubt as to the answer. The sad thing is that there should be persons with such split minds as to ask the villagers, in one breath, to make a common endeavour to better their lives, and in the second breath, ask them to fight among themselves for the power to achieve that very end.

It is sometimes urged that in the name of uncontested elections, the traditional bosses of rural society will be able to capture the *panchayats*. This might and does happen. But the same thing might and does happen even when there are contested elections. The remedy for bossdom is not electoral contest, but daring and imaginative socio-economic reform and education and enlightenment of the masses.

There is another important aspect of the matter to be stressed. The *gram panchayat*, in order to discharge its moral responsibilities, must work for providing a minimum of social security and welfare to the weaker sections of the community. In the absence of legislative powers to alter the socio-economic pattern of rural society, the only conceivable manner in which the *panchayats* might be able to fulfil this task is by obtaining the goodwill and cooperation of the stronger sections and by persuading them to share voluntarily a part of their wealth, talent and time with their less fortunate neighbours. Any other approach at the village level would be ruinous and self-defeating. Experience has shown that even when backward sections of the village have captured a *panchayat*, defeating the traditionally dominant section, they have failed to achieve anything because of the non-cooperation and opposition of the defeated interests. The class conflict approach at the village level is likely to help least those very sections of the community that stand most in need of it.

Thus the conclusion is inescapable that it is desirable from every point of view that there should be no contests at elections to village panchayats. The question now is how can this be done. Several suggestions have been made in that behalf, and experiments made, particularly in the old Saurashtra under the Chief Ministership of Shri U. N. Dhebar. If the principle were accepted, it should not be difficult to find a way to translate it into practice. Unfortunately, it is the view in some quarters that unless there is electoral contest, there is no democracy. It is this static, abstract, wooden view that comes in the way of finding a solution. But I am certain that unless a solution is found, Panchayati Raj would never be a success.

It might appear to the political parties in the country that if there were to be no contest, they would have no function to perform in the village. Far from it: they would have a very constructive job to do there. If they accepted the idea that it was in the best interest of the village to choose uncontested *panchayats*, that should become a challenge to them, and they should all join together to *educate* and *persuade* the villagers to do so—a challenging and creative task. If one leaves aside personal ambitions, this should not be difficult for the parties to do, because, after all, the affairs of the village hardly admit of party-political differences.

It is necessary to add here a kind of foot-note. The above discussion might make it appear as if the towns and cities are to be excluded from the proposed structure of democracy, because it is shown to rest only on *gram sabhas* and there is no mention of *nagar sabhas*. That would, indeed, be far from the total conception of Panchayati Raj or participating democracy. It is true that Panchayati Raj at present is confined only to the rural areas, but as it develops and comes finally to enfold the whole nation, the democratic institutions of the urban communities will also have to be integrated into its structure. The word *gram* then might denote not only a village, but simply a primary community, urban or rural. The large towns and cities are, of course, not primary communities, but they are generally made up of smaller areas that correspond roughly to a primary community. In North India the *mohalla* is usually such an area. Thus even large cities might be conceived of as federations of primary urban communities or communes. The cities of Yugoslavia are, for instance, organized on this pattern : each commune, which might be either wholly urban or made up of partly urban and partly rural areas (outlying the city), having its own autonomous political institutions, coordinated with other similar communes so as to constitute an urban, or urbo-rural, district. It is contrary to the spirit of Panchayati Raj that even our large towns and cities should have a centralized and unitary administration. The possibility of citizens' participation in civic affairs is very limited under these conditions. It should not be difficult so to amend our Municipal Acts as to introduce the principles of participating democracy or Panchayati Raj into the working of urban self-government.

Seventh, the day-to-day working of Panchayati Raj should be put outside the purview of the State Governments. Panchayati Raj is being ushered in through enactments of the State Legislatures. This is only right and proper. It is also proper that the State Governments should have power to frame the necessary Rules under the Acts, care being taken that the former do not go contrary to the spirit or intention of the latter. It has been noticed that sometimes the Acts are too vague in important parts, so that the Rules framed by the Executive acquire an importance even greater than the Acts themselves. However, this is a matter for the Legislatures to take care of.

What I am trying here to suggest is that after the necessary Acts and Rules have been passed by the proper authorities, their working should be placed under the care and control of an autonomous body of the kind of the Public Service Commission, the Election Commission, the University Grants Commission, etc.

The State Governments, as all governments under the parliamentary system must be, are party governments. Therefore, without imputing any undue partisanship to them, it is natural to assume that before taking any action they would pause and consider the possible consequences of that action for their party. They would be more than human if they did not do that. Now party interest need not be identical with the people's interest. It might be considered to be in the interest of the ruling party to capture or control the institutions of Panchayati Raj, whereas for the health and growth of the latter it might be essential to keep them from being made pawns in the partisan warfare for power. In view of the deteriorating standards of public conduct, the interference of the State Government, or the Minister concerned, in the affairs of Panchayati Raj might go even beyond party interests to factional or communal or personal interests. Opposition parties in the country have often alleged that District Boards and Municipalities have sometimes been superseded entirely for partisan reasons and elections to them unduly delayed because of them. Charges have been made of other kinds of partisan interference with the working of these bodies.

There is also another aspect of the matter. It is a common observation that those in power are reluctant to give it up. In the present power-structure at the State level, there are two partners—the Ministers with their supporters and the higher bureaucracy. Both of them might suffer from that common weakness, and surrender power in words and withhold it in deeds.

On account of the above considerations, it should be desirable to entrust the job of assisting, guiding and supervising the establishment, working and development of Panchayati Raj to a non-political, autonomous body headed by a person who does not belong to the civil service. The latter stipulation seems to be necessary because a civil servant is likely to be under the thumb of the government and partial to the rights and privileges of the civil servants working under Panchayati Raj. The

functions of the proposed Panchayati Raj Commission would be to see that the different bodies are set up and function according to law ; allotment of funds from the State and Centre are properly paid out and utilized ; the higher tiers do not unduly interfere with the lower ; the administrative staff functions under the democratic control provided for in law and at the same time its interests are protected ; and proper corrective or disciplinary action is taken against any offending office-holder or institution of the Panchayati Raj. The functions of the Commission should not be negative only, but also positive. In other words, it should be the duty of the Commission also to *help* the institutions and individuals concerned to function properly and efficiently so that Panchayati Raj might become strong, self-reliant and competent.

It was Shri N. G. Ranga, M.P., who was the first to make this suggestion in the Lok Sabha. I hope that the fact of Shri Ranga being an Opposition leader would not detract from its value and set up a barrier to its acceptance.

Before I conclude this discussion of Panchayati Raj in action I should briefly touch upon two types of criticism levelled against it. It is said that the village people are too backward, ignorant and ill-informed to be able to govern themselves. There is no doubt that the pattern of our society for centuries has been such that the rural masses have perforce had to suffer from extreme backwardness in some matters. They are, however, no more backward morally, or deficient mentally, than the urban elite. But it would be wrong, undemocratic, even presumptuous, on that ground to deny them the right to self-government. Our foreign rulers, it will be remembered, were accustomed to use exactly the same kind of argument to deny India her right to independence. This kind of argument was answered a long time ago when it was said that good government can never be a substitute for self-government.

Moreover, a little reflection should induce some humility in those who are wont to trot out such absurd arguments. May not the backward rural masses turn round and ask of the 'advanced' urban classes, who give themselves such airs of superiority, if they have been able to manage the affairs of the country with any great success or distinction ?

It is not my intention to suggest that the village people would be able, from the beginning, to make the best possible use of

the power and resources that are going to be thrust upon them in the wake of Panchayati Raj. There is no doubt that they will make mistakes. But, first of all, it is only by actually handling responsibility that the necessary competence and ability for self-government can be acquired; and secondly, the remedy for backwardness is not to deny the people their sovereign rights but to enlighten, educate and train them with as much expedition as possible. Only those who wish to shirk this task talk glibly about the backwardness of the country 'yokel'.

Another criticism of Panchayati Raj, which has led a few even to oppose its introduction, is that rural society being so conservative and so dominated by traditionally privileged classes, village democracy cannot but be exceedingly conservative and illiberal. It is feared, accordingly, that the traditionally dominant classes will use the political and economic institutions of Panchayati Raj to perpetuate their privileged position. There is considerable force in this view. But, once again, the remedy is not to distrust the people and prevent the frontiers of democracy from advancing. Here too the chief remedy is social education, without which no revolutionary change could be possible. No amount of progressive legislation from above would be of any avail in the absence of an energetic and effective campaign of education. The other remedy is to *build in* such safeguards and guarantees in the very structure of Panchayati Raj as would make it unavoidable for those in command to work for lifting up the backward and weak sections of the community.

Let me in conclusion warn that refusal to hand over power and opportunity to the people for self-government would surely lead to complete corrosion of democracy in this country, and either to decline and self-destruction or to some kind of dictatorship.

III

The Economic Pyramid and Arthik Panchayati Raj

The conditions discussed above were all of a political nature. But it is not only the political structure of society that resembles an inverted pyramid: the economic structure also presents the same fantastic picture, whether we look—and this is most important—at the private or the public sector. The two structures are not separate from each other; they form integrated parts of

one and the same house of society. Therefore, it should be obvious to any one who is prepared to give the least thought to the question that the political pyramid cannot be turned over and stood on its base, rather than on its head, without doing the same to the economic pyramid. In other words, political decentralization cannot be effective without economic decentralization.

One consequence of the fact that the idea of Panchayati Raj arose out of the need to induce public co-operation in the execution of development programmes was that while in the political field devolution and decentralization came to receive fair attention, the economic aspect of the matter was completely neglected. It is only recently that those responsible for initiating Panchayati Raj have become conscious of the fact that political decentralization is bound to remain nominal unless there is alongside economic decentralization too. The Gandhian or Sarvodaya Movement, of course, had been emphasizing the point all along, but it did not receive attention until very recently. The difficulty, however, is that no one has any very clear idea as to how a decentralised economy in this age of science and technology and in the given conditions of India could be developed. Mere harping on Khadi and Village Industries will not take us far.

It is a matter of satisfaction that India is committed to a democratic socialist pattern of society. Even though no one has any clear concept of what that pattern should be, it is gratifying to know that the country is thereby committed to democracy and to the socialist values of life. Now socialists at one time used to believe that if 'the means of production, distribution and exchange' were nationalized, *economic democracy* would automatically come into being. The experience, however, of totalitarian communism has proved that even the complete nationalization of all these means does not necessarily result in economic democracy; on the contrary, it ends up in the most rigorous economic dictatorship, giving rise to new forms of economic exploitation and inequality. Therefore, democratic socialists, or at any rate the more sensitive and thoughtful among them, have come to realise that if they were not to give up the aim of economic democracy, they must not remain content with the traditional slogan of nationalization, but seek ways of decentralizing the economic institutions and processes of society.

It must, however, be admitted that beyond recognizing the need, little further thought has been bestowed upon the question.

Though this is not the place to deal at any length with this question, it might be useful to focus attention here on a few essential features and conditions of a decentralized economy in the present situation obtaining in our country.

First, it is clear that such an economy must be a small-machine and labour-intensive economy. At the same time, it is also clear that there must be a constant and planned effort made to improve the small machine, so that without adding much to its cost, its efficiency and productivity keep on rising. For this the necessary research must be planned and encouraged. Wherever necessary and available, power should be utilized, keeping in mind the over-all and integrated picture of the economy, so that, as far as possible, imbalances between cost, production, consumption and employment are not created.

Second, a decentralized economy must aim at relating full utilization of local and regional resources, human and material, to the satisfaction of local and regional needs. For this, regional surveying and planning would be necessary. This would, further, assume that for production and consumption of different commodities, different areas would serve as economic units, so that there might be some industries that are village industries, some that are block area industries, others that are district, State or Union industries. (Some of the State and all of the Union industries will, of course, be of large-scale.) This does not mean, however, that surpluses from one area would not be exchanged for surpluses of other areas, but it does mean that, by and large, for each type of industry the area concerned would be the geographical zone within which it would operate. It is obvious that suitable economic measures will have to be devised to facilitate small-scale industrialization of this type, and, what is more important, to *protect* this sector of economy from the large-scale, centralized sector, so that it develops healthily and becomes viable.

Third, in view of the man-land ratio and rate of population growth in the country the rural population, despite agricultural development, must face progressive impoverishment if it has to remain dependent solely upon the land. Therefore, the industrialization described above must be integrated intimately with

agriculture, so that every village or at least every small group of villages is developed as an agro-industrial community. The term 'agro-industrial' here does not refer only to industries concerned with the processing of agricultural products. It means an organic blending of agriculture and industry. An agro-industrial community would, for example, not only process wheat and paddy, fruit and vegetables, sugarcane and cotton, but also manufacture radios, cycle-parts, small machines, electrical goods, etc., that might be needed in the region. Such a development might also narrow down the gap that is widening between city and village and mitigate the evils of urbanization.

Fourth, it is clear that the organizational pattern of decentralized industry and trade must also be different from that in the centralized sector, whether private or public. The decentralized pattern would overwhelmingly be of the owner-worker or co-operative type. Thus, this sector would neither be bureaucracy-ridden nor exploitative. It will also be more egalitarian than the centralized sector, whether public or private.

Fifth, the political institutions of *Panchayati Raj* will have to play an important role in this economic development. The problem is to discover how this could be done.

I would like to conclude with a few general remarks. I should like, *first*, to make clear that it is not my concern at all to preserve traditional modes of production. For my purpose the debate between the modern and traditional is irrelevant. What I am suggesting is, indeed, a most modern type of economy, the like of which does not exist or has existed anywhere, and to create which the utmost possible help of science, including social science, would be required. In other words, a new machine technology as well as a new socio-economic technology would have to be created. It is not the type of decentralization that exists in the highly centralized economies of the West or of Japan that I have in mind. Decentralization in those countries is subservient to centralization and is a mode of existence for the latter. For me the dominant pattern of the economy is one of decentralization, with such centralization as is found unavoidable. There has to be a certain balance between the two, no doubt, but the decentralized sector is not to be just a complement of the centralized one.

Second, it is important to remember that the decentralized economy I am advocating is desirable not only because it would be democratic, but also because, and this is an important point, it would yield immediate benefits to the masses. It would do so because it would offer employment on a mass scale and produce wealth in a manner that would ensure its wide distribution and make 'wage-goods' immediately available to ordinary consumers. In the centralized sector, let it be remembered, benefits of industrialization have slowly to percolate down from the top to the bottom. In the West it took no less than a century for those benefits to reach the common man. It is obvious that in a country of such poverty as India, where even articles of the barest necessity are scarce, and where unemployment and under-employment are so chronic and have such gigantic proportions, a decentralized and not a centralized economy is the crying need—that is, if the aim of economic development is *welfare* of the people.

Third, in order to create an economy of the type described above it would be necessary radically to reform rural education. To serve this purpose, rural education must be predominantly non-bookish, practical and technical education, with special emphasis on training in agricultural techniques. Such educational reform must be a part of the research and planning mentioned earlier. Further, rural education must include large-scale *practical* adult education. Such education incidentally would also provide an answer to the difficult question: wherefrom and how the entrepreneurial personnel required for the development of the decentralized economy could be obtained.

Lastly, in the present extraordinary situation in the country when ambitious plans that have to depend upon massive foreign assistance are the fashion, it is natural that the Centre should come to have sole command over vast resources that it may distribute to the States. It is obvious that in this situation the Centre should become disproportionately powerful and all the lower organs should be reduced to the status of beggars. This naturally plays havoc with the growth of democracy, but this is not the place to go into the complex question of foreign assistance and its impact not only on economic growth but on every aspect and institution of national life. It will suffice to point out that decentralized economic development would have the benefit

of being less dependent than the centralized sector on foreign aid and the Centre. Mainly for three reasons : (a) the element of voluntary labour would be greater ; (b) it would absorb and utilise a far larger proportion of small savings ; and (c) overhead charge, transport and other social costs would be much lower. Thus in this sense too a decentralized economy would be more democratic.

IV

Transformation of the Pyramid or Fulfilment of Democracy

While the attempt to establish *Panchayati Raj* is a step in the direction of a more stable, popular and satisfying form of democracy, a step that, when properly executed, might succeed in taking *swaraj* to the people, it is not adequate by itself. In order that the edifice of democracy might be strong and invulnerable, the top layers of it must be built into the foundational structure. But as the situation stands at present, the foundational structure is going to be raised only upto the district level, beyond which, i.e. at the State and Union levels, a completely different structure will continue to exist, resting on nothing more solid than a sand heap, namely, the amorphous mass of individual and disparate voters. This is a very unhappy mixture of two different principles and processes of democracy that, like water and oil, will not mix. The differences between the two may be summed up as follows :

The system that rests on individual voters has invariably a tendency towards concentration of power at the top, while the other system tends towards dispersal of power ; in the former, organised parties that are run from above by small and powerful elites play the decisive role ; in the latter, communities and communal representative bodies working from below exert the decisive influence ; in the former, again, the representatives elected by the unorganised voters are not and cannot be under their control, in the latter the electing bodies exercise a continuous influence over the representatives they send to the higher levels ; in the former system the people's participation is limited to casting of votes, in the latter there is direct participation of the whole people through the *gram sabha* and fairly close participation through the higher representative bodies ; in the former system elections are expensive, in the latter just the opposite ; the former requires mass media of propaganda and involves unhealthy

psychological and emotional excitement, in the latter these evils are reduced to the minimum ; in the former most voters are more unlikely to understand the issues which are placed before them than in the latter in which the voters at each level are expected to be well acquainted with the problems that they have to deal with.

It might be useful to elaborate some of the above points of distinction. Take the question of concentration of power at the top in the inorganic system of democracy based on individual voters. This is a very vital matter, but unfortunately is not much appreciated. In this type of democracy there is hardly any force that tends to pull power down towards the people. The voters, though their number may run into millions, in the nature of things lack any organizational means to check the upward suction of power. There are, of course, political parties, and their membership too might run into millions, but the trend everywhere is, even in the democratic parties, for power to be concentrated in a caucus of leaders. There are also special interests, chiefly economic, that attempt to influence this type of democracy, but this influence too tends to be exercised over the centres of power. The growth of economic centralization which aids and abets political centralization has already been referred to. It is true that there are trade unions, cooperative societies and other similar organizations that provide a broadening structure for this type of democracy, but they are not built-in structures of the democratic pattern, and they themselves are tending to become top-heavy and over-centralized. The press does exercise some measure of influence upon the centres of power, but the press is not the people.

Take again the question of voters' control over their representatives. In the existing system the voters have no manner of means to exercise any control over the person they choose to represent them. It is true that if he does not satisfy them, they might not elect him again, but that is a very remote and ineffective kind of control. It is also no doubt true that the political parties to whom the "people's" representatives might belong do exercise some kind of control over them, but party control is an entirely different cup of tea from the control of the voters.

All these circumstances combine to make this kind of democracy a very illusory affair indeed.

The position is quite different in the case of participating or organic democracy. Because the structure of this democracy is to be built of several tiers, beginning with the basic tier of the *gram sabha* and going right up to the Lok Sabha, and because the powers and functions and duties and resources of each tier are clearly defined, power cannot but be dispersed in this system. Further, because the higher tiers are constituted of the representatives of the bodies at the lower tiers, power is much more likely to be exercised from below upwards, rather than from above downwards. For the same reason the representatives at the higher level are under the constant gaze of the bodies at the lower levels, and thus subject to the control of the latter. It should be borne in mind that at no level are the bodies mere collections of amorphous individuals, but organized, statutory entities with well-defined collective powers and functions.

This little elaboration will serve to make clear the vital differences between the two types of democracy. Now, if *Panchayati Raj* stops at the district level and above that, shall we say, Party Raj rules supreme, the people are bound to feel cheated. They will interpret this illogical situation to mean reluctance on the part of the politicians really to give up power. It would seem to them—and they would be right—that power still remained locked up in Delhi and the State capitals and that what had been given to them was not the genuine article; not milk, so to say, but plain water whitened with a little wheat flour. This kind of disillusionment might produce disastrous results.

Therefore, *Panchayati Raj* must not be terminated at the district level but extended forward up to New Delhi. Although this cannot be done immediately, it should be set clearly as the goal.

The obvious defects of our electoral system have often been stressed by the political leaders of the country, including the Prime Minister. The latest to do so was Mr. Sanjeeva Reddy, the Congress President, at Bhavnagar. But it is noteworthy that whenever this issue is raised it is only in the form of direct *versus* indirect elections; it being pointed out, no doubt rightly, that the present system of direct elections has become excessively costly and that it also aggravates such evils as casteism and parochialism.

There is nothing wrong in such formulation, but it does miss the fundamental point, namely, the nature and form of democracy that should satisfy the people and give them a larger share in government. Or, to put it in another way, the real issue is that of devolution of power and decentralization of administration. Power, as I have tried to show, cannot be devolved, nor administration decentralised, if (a) there were no institutions and centres of self-government below the present State level, and (b) all the different levels of government were not organically or structurally integrated together, so that the higher level drew its support and authority from the lower ones and the whole structure rested ultimately upon the broad base of the *gram sabhas*, comprising the entire adult population of the country.

There will be evils and faults in every system. In *Panchayati Raj* or participating democracy too there will be evils. But that system would be more democratic, and its faults would be more susceptible to correction precisely because it would be more democratic. Many evils could be removed at the very source if elections to the village Panchayats were to be without contest.

The question that now remains to consider is : in what manner should the *Panchayati Raj* be extended to the higher levels.

It would be logical, as I had suggested in my original paper, that each lower level should elect the higher—that is to say, the Village Panchayats the *Panchayat Samiti*, the *Samitis* the *Zila Parishad*, the *Parishads* the State Assembly, the Assemblies the Lok Sabha. But on second thoughts such a procedure would seem to be undesirable. Two main objections might be raised against it. One, that it might encourage parochialism and make the individual citizen and the lower organs of democracy feel that they had no hand in shaping the institutions at the State and Union levels and bore no responsibility to them. Two, as the number of electors at each level, except the lowest, would be small it would be easier for moneyed interests to corrupt them.

The present system may also be said to be open to these objections in varying measures. But that should be no reason for not seeking ways to remedy the defects of the proposed system. The solution cannot be to cling to the existing system which suffers from even graver faults.

I suggest tentatively the following procedure for electing the Vidhan Sabha and the Lok Sabha. Without affecting the

organic nature of the democratic structure as envisaged in this paper, this procedure should meet the objections stated above.

Each *gram sabha* in every constituency should select, at a properly convened general meeting, two *delegates* to an electoral college, that might be called the Electoral Council, in the following manner. At that meeting nominations should be called for, and all the names proposed and seconded should be listed, preferably on a prominently displayed board. If no more than two names are proposed, they automatically become the chosen delegates. In other cases, each name should be voted upon—votes being taken by show of hands—and the votes received by each nominee entered against his name on the board. Thereafter, there should be repeated balloting in order to eliminate all except two of the nominees. This might be done by dropping, at each ballot, the name receiving the least votes at the previous ballot, and the voters voting for the remaining names. This would be a simple, inexpensive procedure and, as the *gram sabhas* gather experience in conducting meetings, passing budgets and making other collective decisions as a result of their vital role in *Panchayati Raj*, this electoral procedure should soon become one of their simpler jobs. A few rehearsals under the guidance of the *panchayat* president should remove whatever difficulties they might at first encounter in working it.

The next step should be for the Electoral Council to be convened, in other words, for the chosen delegates of the *gram sabhas* of the constituency concerned—whether of the Vidhan Sabha or the Lok Sabha—to meet at a central place in the area. It should be the task of the Electoral Council to set up candidates for election. The following procedure might be adopted for this purpose.

First, there should be nominations, and then votes taken on each name proposed and seconded. Persons receiving not less than a given minimum of votes, say, 30 per cent, should be declared to be the candidates from the constituency for the Vidhan or Lok Sabha as the case might be.

As I consider it necessary for the fulfilment of democracy—no matter what be its kind—that its processes are as little divisive as possible, or to put it positively, as cohesive and unitive as possible, I urge strongly that every constitutional and educational means should be adopted to encourage the Electoral Councils

to set up no more than one candidate for every seat. After all, in the ultimate result, no matter what be the number of candidates and the procedure of election, there is one and only one person elected to represent the whole constituency. (I am speaking of single-member constituencies.) Democratic theory somewhat illogically lays down that once a representative has been elected, no matter how much opposition there had been to him at the election, he represents his constituency as a *whole* and should serve even those who had opposed him. The illogicality as well as the unnecessary excitement and wastage of energy and money could be avoided if the delegates to the Electoral Council could be persuaded to select only one name to be put up as a candidate. If, however, this does not happen to be practicable in some cases the names selected in the manner described above should be declared to be the candidates. Final elections should then be held in the following manner.

The names of the candidates selected by the Electoral Council should be sent to all the *gram sabhas* of the constituency concerned. Each *sabha* should convene a general meeting where votes should be taken for each candidate. Thereafter one of two alternatives should be followed :

(1) The candidate receiving the largest number of votes should be declared to be the person whom the particular *gram sabha* wants to represent it in the higher *sabha*. Of all such persons the one receiving the largest number of *gram sabha* votes is finally declared to be the member of the Vidhan or Lok Sabha (as the case might be) from that constituency.

(2) Alternatively, the votes received by each candidate at the general meeting of each *gram sabha* should be recorded. Then the votes that each has received at the different *gram sabha* meetings all over the constituency should be totalled. The candidate receiving the largest number of such votes then becomes the member from that constituency.

This system of election, it will be seen, achieves several desired results. One, it binds structurally the upper storeys of the democratic edifice with the lowest, lending prestige, strength and meaning to the *gram sabhas* and lifting them out of the possible morass of localism ; two, it gives a direct opportunity to every adult citizen to participate in choosing the highest organs of democracy, making it possible at the same time—and this is very

important—to do so in an *organised* manner through the *gram sabhas* and the Electoral Councils so that he might be in a position to exercise due influence over his representatives. The particles of sand are no longer separate little helpless things, but cohesive bricks of stone. A house built on a foundation of stone-bricks is very different from a house built on sand.

V

The Transitional Period and the Next General Elections

As pointed out earlier, the lower tiers of the democratic structure described here are being presently created under the initiative of the Prime Minister and Mr. S. K. Dey, with full endorsement of the last plenary session of the Congress. The extension of this structure upwards will obviously take some time. In the meanwhile, the third General Elections are going to be held some time in the next year. The questions that present themselves before all those who believe in building democracy from below are whether there is to be no impact of their ideas upon the next Elections and what steps should be taken in the transitional period so that ground might be well prepared for extension of *Panchayati Raj* to the highest levels.

Election time is obviously a time of intense political activity and mass education. It should, therefore, appear to be obvious for these ideas to be projected as far as possible into the election campaign, so that the new Parliament, as well as public opinion, might be ready to sanction and make the necessary constitutional arrangements in order to erect the two higher and remaining storeys of *Panchayati Raj*. Accordingly, all parties and persons holding these views should make an all-out, concerted and co-ordinated effort to educate public opinion. For this purpose, it should be necessary for representatives of parties, voluntary social movements such as the Sarva Seva Sangh, and other kindred spirits to meet together and reach amongst them a broad general consensus; and then place the agreed proposals and ideas before the people, particularly the voters. It should also be necessary for them to obtain the support of the press, which is rightly the chief maker of public opinion and to carry on a continuous process of discussion, elucidation and persuasion.

While the educative campaign should cover the whole gamut of ideas connected with *Panchayati Raj*, I should like to single

out one of them for special emphasis, because while other ideas might appear to voters to be somewhat unrelated to the election campaign ; this particular one has a clear and direct bearing on it. I refer to the system of selecting candidates through voters' councils.

In my original paper I had put forward the view that the practice of parties setting up candidates limited the choice of the voters and vitiated democracy. I had also pointed out that in that system it was natural for would-be candidates to look up towards the party leadership and try to win its favour in order to obtain a party ticket. That further strengthens the forces of centralization and concentration of power and weakens democracy. I had, therefore, suggested that a new procedure should be devised by which the people, i.e., the voters themselves, could set up candidates. That would help to pull power downwards to the people and give them an opportunity to participate in a vital process of democracy, and make elections more meaningful to them. In the present system the candidates are ' party ' candidates, imposed over the people, whereas in the procedure I am suggesting they would be people's candidates. That should make a world of difference to the attitude of the people to democracy.

I feel that it would be appropriate and important to project this idea into the next General Elections. Because it would have a direct relevance to the elections, it is likely to make a considerable impact upon them. The effort, to my mind, should not be confined to propaganda alone, but wherever possible the idea should also be put into practice. Perhaps, the practice would be limited to a few constituencies only, but the experience gained would be of far greater value.

At the end of the last section, a procedure was suggested through which Electoral Councils could be established for the purpose of choosing candidates. By the time of the next elections, however, it is not likely that statutory *gram sabhas* would be established throughout the country, so that Electoral Councils could be set up for this purpose. Wherever, in an entire constituency, *gram sabhas* have been established by them, the procedure described in the last section could be followed if the people so desired. In constituencies where this might not be the case, *ad hoc* Voters' Councils might be set up through a somewhat similar

procedure. A constituency, for instance, could be divided into a number of small areas, and voters' meetings might be held in each area at which two or more delegates could be elected. These delegates could then meet together in what might be called a Voters' Council and select the candidate or candidates in the same manner as described in the case of the Electoral Council. The desirability of choosing a single candidate has been stressed in this context : it is needless to say that this should apply to the Voters' Councils and for the same reasons.

There is another suggestion that I wish to put forward in the context of the General Elections. The suggestion is Shri Vinobaji's, who has laid great stress on it. During election campaigns the general practice is for contending candidates and their supporters to hold meetings separately from one another. This practice, among other things, makes it possible for mutual misrepresentation, recrimination, even outright abuse, to be widely indulged in. It also gives an opportunity for fanning communal, religious and other passions. All this not only lowers the morale of public life and the dignity of democratic processes, but also confuses and misleads and mis-educates the electorate, who cannot on that account judge issues dispassionately. The present practice also involves unnecessary expenditure.

A great many of these evils could be mitigated, if not completely eradicated, if all the candidates and their propagandists were to appear together on the same platform and explain their policies and offer mutual criticisms in the presence of one another. Each speaker could be given equal time and after their performance, the audience could put them questions.

Such a practice could be initiated in one of two ways. There could be an agreement about it between all parties and candidates concerned—whether party candidates, 'people's' candidates or independents. Or, the voters of a constituency might decide among themselves to ask all concerned to appear together. Incidentally, it should be clear that if the practice of joint meetings is followed, there would be an appreciable reduction in election expenses.

All those who are concerned with the health and quality of our democracy should join hands, to see that at the next Election this practice is followed over as wide an area as possible, if not over the whole country.

It will be of interest to know that what has been suggested above was actually put into practice at least in one village, Sameli, in the district of Purnea in Bihar at the time of the 1937 election. The people of that village had served notice then that there could be no election meeting held within their area unless all the candidates agreed to address them together. Agreement to that effect was actually obtained and there was only one joint election meeting held in that village. What Sameli did in 1937 could be done by every village in 1962.

It is obviously necessary, for the success of the ideas expressed here, to take care that the urban areas are not excluded from their impact either from the point of view of social and political education or actual experimentation. This is still the more essential in view of the fact that programmes both of *Panchayati Raj* and community development leave these areas completely out of their purview.

I have indicated earlier how urban self-government could be established on similar principles and practices as those of *Panchayati Raj*. Concrete steps should be taken in that direction wherever possible, culminating eventually, not in the distant but near future, in amendments of the existing Municipal Acts. The necessary initiative might be taken by conferences of municipal bodies and the All-India Panchayat Parishad.

In the meanwhile, even under the existing law attempts should be made to put as much of these ideas into practice as possible. For instance, both the public and the parties should be persuaded not to allow party politics to intrude into civic affairs. That is to say, it should be agreed upon that the political parties do not set up any candidates at municipal elections. For those elections too the candidates should be selected through Electoral or Voters' Councils in the same manner as described above. And again in the same manner and for the same reasons, attempt should be made to secure agreed candidates so as to avoid contests and divisions in the community. As I have said before, true democracy demands that existing divisions, inequalities and conflicts in society are not accentuated by its processes, but smoothed out and ultimately eliminated by the promotion of community spirit and common endeavour towards the common good.

It is time now to bring this brief discussion to a conclusion. I have tried in this little pamphlet to put forward a political

programme in which every citizen can participate, and by doing which he can convert Indian democracy into an impregnable fortress. At present the political atmosphere in the country is charged with tension, nervousness and uncertainty. The fate of the country seems to lie in the hands of a few great leaders. This is a very unstable state of affairs and, along with other consequences, it is likely to lead to national paralysis. The only remedy seems to be for the people to take their fate in their own hands and shape it according to their will. Here is how they can do it. Will the people accept the challenge? If they do not, their fate seems well-nigh sealed to me.

1961

21. Whither India?*

WHILE I find no reason to take an alarmist view of the general situation in the country I think it is nevertheless one that is full of anxiety. We have made progress in some directions, but have slipped back in many others. Events have taken place that have rudely reminded us that the task of national integration, for the greater part, remains unfulfilled. Linguistic patriotism has often asserted itself over national patriotism. Communalism and casteism have too often bared their ugly teeth. Ordinary human feelings and decency have too easily become the common casualties amidst all this madness.

There are so many facets of the Indian situation that it would be impossible to deal with them all. However, I do wish to have a brief look at the political and economic facets, which are of such vital significance for the fate of this country and its people and which, incidentally, have so much to do also with the forces of strife and disintegration.

We Sarvodaya workers often think of ourselves as having nothing to do with politics. Others also have the same view of us. Let us stop to examine this 'dis-interest' in politics. What does it mean? It means, of course, that we do not belong to any political party, that we do not and shall not take part, directly or indirectly, in any political contest for position or power. But does it also mean that we are not concerned with what is happening in the political field: with the working of our democracy and its various institutions? If democracy were to be in peril, if there were danger of political chaos, of dictatorship, shall we

* Adapted from the Presidential Address to the Thirteenth All-India Sarvodaya Sammelan held at Sarvodayapuram (Andhra Pradesh).

sit back smugly and twiddle our thumbs on the ground that we have nothing to do with politics? Perhaps it is not understood clearly that our policy not to be involved in party and power politics is meant precisely to enable us to play a more effective and constructive part in moulding the politics of the country. We say it is not *rajaniti* but *lokaniti* in which we are interested, but we do not seem to appreciate the full implications of that statement.

No one can help sensing the atmosphere of political tension, anxiety and fear that pervades the country. The proceedings of our Parliament itself bear testimony to this. Finding themselves in this sad predicament, the only remedy that occurs to the people is to search for a leader who will save them. The universal question, "Who after Nehru?" is a symptom of this political malaise.

What answer do we have for this dangerous challenge? Surely, we cannot just shrug our shoulders and say that we are not interested. That would be the height of irresponsibility. The assumption on which our movement proceeds has been that conditions would continue to be normal in our country, so that we would have an undisturbed opportunity to do our work. But once that assumption is destroyed, that opportunity too is destroyed.

I humbly submit that that assumption is no longer so well-founded as it was even a few years ago. Its continued validity depends upon what answer we make to the challenge that faces us. We know that searching for the leader is no answer. That only aggravates the sense of despair and helplessness among the people and paves the way for dictatorship. What then is the answer? Our philosophy of *lokaniti* should tell us that the answer is to inculcate self-confidence in the people, to give them the opportunities and the resources to manage their affairs themselves, to train them for the task, and in this manner create and strengthen the foundations of our democracy. It seems to me that we do not fully appreciate the dimensions of this task. There is no doubt that we are trying our best to establish *gram-swaraj*. But the number of the villages concerned is small and there seems to be little hope in the near future of their number shooting up very high. If, therefore, we do not succeed in the near future in developing a mass movement of *gram-swaraj*, how do we answer that challenge after all?

Let me put another question : What about those matters that pertain to levels beyond the village ? In how many areas or zones, no matter how small or big, are we trying to experiment with *lok-swaraj* ? In hardly a handful. Our effort is too inadequate. Whereas the situation demands a mass movement of political building up from below, we seem to be content with our extremely meagre efforts. These efforts indeed are valuable, because they would serve as models and standards of comparison. But they cannot do duty for a mass programme.

Panchayati Raj has already been introduced into several States, and will soon be introduced into others. I am not suggesting that in its present form this is all that we would wish it to be. But of three things I am certain : one, it is not a make-belief nor an attempt to hoodwink the people and in the name of political decentralisation to enhance the power of the bureaucracy and the government ; two, it is capable of indefinite improvement ; three, if it fails, our own *grain-swaraj* programme will be doomed.

I is my emphatic view, therefore, that we should throw ourselves heart and soul into the *Panchayati Raj* movement, which even now is a people's movement as much as an official programme, but which is bound to become, as time passes, more and more of the former. Our participation in this movement should be on two levels : one, on the level of study so as to help in removing the defects in the Acts and the Rules ; two, on the level of what might briefly be called *lok-siksan* (social education and training) and *lok-sakti*, i.e. creation of the necessary competence among the people. To the extent we succeed at the second level, we would be effective at the first.

Though I cannot at all speak on behalf of the Government, it would not be wrong, I am sure, to say that it would not only welcome our cooperation, but also be most desirous of it. The Government believes that the work particularly of *lok-siksan* and of developing *lok-sakti* can best be carried out by voluntary agencies.

In this manner, if a concerted effort were made to make *Panchayati Raj* a success, I feel that sooner than many would dare to hope today, the whole political climate in the country could be changed and a new feeling of self-confidence created. The present challenge could thus be largely met.

According to the present scheme, *Panchayati Raj* is to rise only up to the district level. In my *Swaraj for the People* I have argued at some length why in the interest of fuller and less expensive democracy, it should be extended right up to the top. Many of the country's leaders have from time to time spoken in favour of an indirect system of election. I hope, therefore, that our proposals in that behalf would receive their serious attention. Let me say, however, that the details of the proposals made in my pamphlet should be taken as nothing more than a basis for discussion.

In regard to the forthcoming General Election, I have dealt with some revolutionary ideas in my tract. It is our view that the present method of setting up candidates limits democracy, because it limits the freedom of choice of the voters. Therefore, we have put forward the proposal for setting up Voters' Councils for the selection of candidates. In view of the fact that many people are said to be fed up with the struggle for power between parties, factions and ambitious politicians and, more fundamentally, because of the fact that the method suggested by us gives more power to the voters and frees them from the domination of the parties, it should not be difficult to put the idea into practice, at least in a number of selected constituencies.

Lest there be any misunderstanding, it should be made clear that it is not our intention that the Sarvodaya movement should set up or support any candidates, or have anything to do with the elections in that sense. Ours is merely an educative role: we shall try to explain our point of view to the voters, and if it appeals to them, it will be entirely their job to put it into practice.

Let me now take a brief look at the economic situation. It is no doubt gratifying to know that there has been an increase in the national income of as much as forty per cent in the last ten years. But those of us who work in the villages and daily come into contact with the common people are hard put to it to discover any corresponding improvement among them. It is a pity that our economic dialogue with the Government, our planners and our experts gets always bogged down in discussions about centralization and decentralization, the obscurities of the theory of self-sufficiency, the right and wrong attitude to science and technology and so on and on. The experts and the planners have had it all their own way. But the obstinate facts of poverty,

unemployment, starvation—rather, scarcity, because since *swaraj* the word starvation, if not starvation itself, has been rigorously banned—persist shamelessly to stare us in the face. We are prepared to admit that all our fanciful theories are wrong or out-of-date and that by insisting upon humanisation of economics, we are acting as sheer romantics. But the people want food and jobs and want to live differently from animals. How are the planners to give all that to the people? Has anyone the right to produce plastics and rayon and synthetic rubber as long as people are hungry and naked? What does planning mean, and economic growth, and whom are they meant to serve?

By all means more wealth must be produced, and produced as efficiently as possible. But in a poor and starving country is it not urgent that it should be so produced that it reaches the people without delay? To use Vinobaji's expressive word, why should the people be made to wait for wealth produced at the top slowly to *percolate* down to them? And how long should they wait, and by what trick of planning and statistical economic growth would the explosive force of their accumulated suffering be prevented from detonating?

In the West, competent economists have computed that it took anywhere from a hundred to two hundred years for the fruits of industrialisation to reach the labouring classes. May be this time-lag could be reduced under our socialist dispensation though, looking at the share-out of the surplus value in the public sector, there is no ground for such a hope. But even granting that that was possible, can the desperately needy millions of this country wait even fifty years? Will democracy have any chance then, or Sarvodaya?

Perhaps our planners are doing what others have done before. But in the West, economic growth was far more organic, indigenous and evenly distributed than in our country. Here, when a huge population with too little land, living on a bullock-cart economy, is suddenly confronted with imported automation economy, the problems of growth assume an entirely different complexion, requiring an entirely different treatment.

I do fervently hope, therefore, that on the eve of the Third Plan, there would be some fresh thinking on this question. There seem to me to be only two possible alternatives: (a) either to produce wealth as efficiently as possible in a few centres and

keep the rest of the country more or less on subsidies; or (b) produce wealth in every home and hamlet and township. That is to say, either a few have to be employed and the rest kept on doles; or all are employed and make some kind of living.

Looking at the problem from the eyes of eighty per cent of the people, that is, the rural people, *khadi* and village industries have hardly touched the fringe of their problem; small-scale industries have hardly entered their field, and large-scale industries have done more harm than good. For us, the rural folk, this division of industries has no meaning. What we want is a massive programme of *rural* industrialisation, for which purpose I suggest that the Khadi and Village Industries Commission and the Small-Scale Industries Board be merged into one comprehensive and coordinated Rural Industries Commission. (For the urban areas, the S.S.I. Board might function as required.) It should be the task of that Commission to help as fast as possible in the development of the present purely agricultural economy of the villages into a balanced agro-industrial economy in such a manner that urban exploitative interests do not get a foot-hold into it and the mass of the rural population is able to participate both in its workings and benefits. Incidentally, such a rural development, I am sure, would produce a salutary effect even in the urban sector.

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